



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



MONDAY — 7 FEB 2022

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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	02/07 Iran: nuclear talks? Remove sanctions first
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-says-removal-us-sanctions-is-its-red-line-revival-2015-deal-2022-02-07/
GIST	<p>DUBAI, Feb 7 (Reuters) - Iran said on Monday that Washington had to make a "political decision" regarding lifting sanctions on the Islamic Republic as Tehran's demand for their full removal to revive a 2015 nuclear deal with world powers was non-negotiable.</p> <p>After eight rounds of indirect talks between Tehran and Washington since April, differences remain about the speed and scope of lifting sanctions on Tehran, including Iran's demand for a U.S. guarantee of no further punitive steps, and how and when to restore curbs on Iran's atomic work.</p> <p>The talks paused on Jan. 28 as top negotiators returned to their respective capitals for consultations. U.S. Special Envoy for Iran Robert Malley on Sunday said he would soon return to Vienna, insisting the pact could still be revived.</p> <p>"The issue of removal of sanctions and Iran benefiting from it is Iran's red line in the talks," Iranian foreign ministry spokesperson Saeed Khatibzadeh told a weekly news conference.</p> <p>"If the U.S. returns to Vienna with a political decision and a specific agenda ... to remove the sanctions, then surely it will be possible to reach a deal quickly."</p> <p>Iran's lead nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani would return to Vienna on Tuesday, Khatibzadeh said.</p> <p>U.S. President Joe Biden's administration on Friday re-introduced sanctions waivers for Iran to allow international nuclear cooperation projects, as indirect American-Iranian talks on a 2015 international nuclear agreement with Tehran enter the final stretch.</p> <p>"Washington has decided to take a step which has no impact on Iran's economic situation," Khatibzadeh said, echoing Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian, who on Sunday described the U.S. move as a "good but insufficient" step.</p> <p>Iran has gradually violated nuclear limits of the nuclear pact in reaction to then-U.S. President Donald Trump's 2018 withdrawal from the agreement between Tehran and six powers and reimposing of crippling sanctions on Iran.</p> <p>Iran insists on the immediate removal of all Trump-era sanctions in a verifiable process. Washington has said it would remove curbs inconsistent with the 2015 pact if Iran resumed compliance with the deal, implying it would leave in place others such as those imposed under terrorism or human rights measures.</p> <p>Khatibzadeh rejected warnings by Western officials that time is running out to resurrect the pact, given Tehran's nuclear advances.</p>

	"We do not consider any fake deadlines ... This round can be the last round if other parties fulfill their obligations and provide guarantees to Iran," he said.
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HEADLINE	02/07 Indonesia tightens curbs; infections spike
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/indonesia-bans-foreign-tourist-arrivals-jakarta-airport-covid-19-spikes-2022-02-07/
GIST	<p>JAKARTA, Feb 7 (Reuters) - Indonesia will tighten social restrictions in Jakarta and Bali, as well as in two other cities on Java island, in a bid to contain a spike in coronavirus infections, a senior cabinet minister said on Monday.</p> <p>Separately, the transport ministry clarified that overseas tourists would still be able to enter the country through the capital Jakarta, after the ministry indicated otherwise in a statement issued on Sunday.</p> <p>It earlier said foreign tourists and Indonesians returning from holidays abroad would be temporarily banned from flying into Jakarta, as a further precaution against COVID-19.</p> <p>The new statement said tourists with the right paperwork could arrive through Jakarta and Bali airports, as well as via Batam and Tanjung Pinang in the Riau Islands near Singapore.</p> <p>The Southeast Asian country has seen a jump in cases driven by the Omicron variant, with more than 36,000 infections reported on Sunday and the bed occupancy rate at hospitals in the capital reaching 63%, up from 45% in January.</p> <p>Senior cabinet minister Luhut Pandjaitan, who oversees the pandemic response in Java and Bali, announced tightened social restrictions in greater Jakarta, Bali, as well as in the city of Bandung in West Java and Yogyakarta in Central Java.</p> <p>Under the new regulations supermarkets, malls and restaurants will operate at 60% capacity, while capacity at houses of worship will be reduced to 50%, he told a streamed news conference.</p> <p>Three provinces, including Jakarta, Banten and Bali, had already exceeded infection rates seen during the wave driven by the Delta variant last July, but hospitalisations had remained relatively low, Health Minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin told the same news conference.</p> <p>"Don't panic when you see an increase in cases," Budi said.</p> <p>Indonesian officials have warned the surge in cases may not peak until late February.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/07 Across Asia, spike follows Lunar New Year
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-asia-pandemics-hong-kong-e7f5fd270cdda82a655008f0cd3b166f
GIST	<p>SINGAPORE (AP) — Many Asian countries are facing a spike in COVID-19 infections after the widely-celebrated Lunar New Year holidays, as health officials grapple with the highly-transmissible omicron variant and expectations that numbers will continue to rise in coming weeks.</p> <p>The Lunar New Year, which is China's biggest holiday, was celebrated across Asia on Feb. 1 even as pandemic restrictions in many countries kept crowds and family outings to a minimum.</p> <p>Hong Kong's authorities are confronting record cases that are straining its so-called "zero-COVID" policy. On Monday, the city reported a new high of 614 local infections.</p>

“We expect there will be more cases coming in a few days. We consider this as some effects after the holiday events and clusters,” told reporters on Monday Edwin Tsui, an official with the Centre for Health Protection.

“With our current containment measures, we hope we can still contain the disease.”

Hong Kong currently requires all cases to be hospitalized. On Monday, authorities announced that close contacts of infected persons will be allowed to isolate at home, starting from Tuesday. Those who test positive while in home isolation will be transferred to a hospital.

Hong Kong has aligned itself with China’s “zero-COVID” policy that aims to totally stamp out outbreaks, even as many other countries change their approach to living with the virus. Authorities look to impose lockdowns on residential buildings wherever clusters of infections are identified, and have banned public dining after 6 p.m.

In Singapore, a dramatic rise in coronavirus infections followed last week’s holiday, with cases tripling to 13,000 on Friday.

Daily infections have since dipped to 7,752 on Sunday, amid restrictions that include limited capacity for restaurants and capping the number of unique visitors to each household.

Singapore has reported over 100,000 cases spanning the last month, although over 99% of the cases are mild or asymptomatic.

Across Asia, authorities are confronting a similar pattern as the more easily transmissible omicron becomes dominant, even as health officials in several countries report that omicron surges are not driving hospitalizations or deaths as high as the previous delta variant.

In Japan, nearly 90,000 new cases nationwide were reported on Sunday, including 17,526 in Tokyo, as local omicron infections showed no signs of slowing.

Experts say the infections are now spreading to vulnerable elderly people who are beginning to fill more hospital beds. Less than 5% of the country’s population has received their third dose of the coronavirus vaccine.

Local outbreak numbers are similarly rising in Indonesia, edging toward the caseloads that marked the height of last year’s devastating delta outbreak.

On Jan. 6, Indonesia recorded 533 new COVID-19 cases and seven deaths. A month later on Sunday, the daily figure had soared to 36,057. Daily deaths have also climbed to 57, almost four times the rate a week ago.

In Thailand, officials on Monday reported more than 10,000 daily cases for the third day in a row, but the Department of Disease Control said that the number of severely ill patients was dropping, while the fatality rate has remained stable.

Department chief Opas Karnkawinpong said that Thailand might consider relaxing some of the country’s pandemic restrictions, as the omicron variant seemed to be less severe.

“The global situation of COVID-19 seems to be moving in the same direction,” he was quoted as saying in The Bangkok Post. “Many countries have started to ease measures despite spikes in daily infections.”

In other countries where the Lunar New Year is a major holiday, governments are likewise on high alert ahead of expectations that omicron will continue to stoke higher infections.

New cases in Malaysia have been hovering higher, with the health ministry reporting 11,034 on Monday. The rise came after the Lunar New Year when many Malaysians travel, but health officials said most of the cases were asymptomatic or have light symptoms.

Top health official Noor Hisham Abdullah has warned that daily cases could double by the end of March and urged Malaysians to take their booster dose. Some 98% of adults in the country have completed their vaccination and half of them have received their third jab.

In South Korea, health experts warn that the country may see daily jumps of 130,000 or 170,000 by late February.

The country reported 38,691 new cases of the virus, a nine-fold increase from the levels seen in mid-January, when omicron became the country's dominant strain.

In Vietnam, authorities have warned that infections may rise after the popular new year holiday.

Vietnam reported 192 cases of the omicron variant in the past month, with most of those showing only mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. With low hospitalization and death rates, Vietnam had previously moved toward resuming most social activities.

The Philippines has moved to ease coronavirus restrictions and open its doors to tourists as outbreak numbers eased to about 8,300 on Sunday, down from a peak of 39,000 in mid-January.

But social distancing restrictions remain in place amid fears of an outbreak ahead of the country's presidential and general elections May 9. Campaigning begins on Tuesday, with a ban in place on handshakes, kissing, hugging and large crowds.

In mainland China, new local infections continue to fluctuate, falling as low as nine on Friday, but rising again to 45 on Monday, most of them in the southern region of Guangxi.

Recent cases have included a handful of omicron infections, though such outbreaks have been tightly contained. Chinese authorities have imposed strict local lock downs and mass testing, as the country kicked off the Beijing Winter Olympics last week.

Meanwhile, the far-flung Pacific archipelago nation of Tonga has been trying to contain its first outbreak since the start of the global pandemic, which might have been brought in with the delivery of emergency medical supplies and water after last month's volcanic eruption and tsunami.

Two Tongan men who worked handling shipments tested positive last week. Over the weekend, Prime Minister Siaosi Sovaleni said two more positive cases were confirmed, bringing the total of active cases to seven.

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HEADLINE	02/07 Ukraine-Russia crisis: rising fear of war
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-joe-biden-business-emmanuel-macron-moscow-9c7b3133b0db8c537ebd667f62a2adef
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS (AP) — Several of the world's top government leaders line up on Monday to walk the diplomatic tightrope that could mean the difference between war and an uneasy peace in Ukraine as Russia's menace on the border of its neighbor continues unabated.</p> <p>Russian President Vladimir Putin stays in the Kremlin following his diplomatic foray to get support from China over the weekend and hosts the prime meeting of the day when French counterpart Emmanuel Macron will be seeking to de-escalate tensions.</p>

Later, U.S. President Joe Biden will meet with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the White House to shore up Western resolve in what they see as Russian aggression.

Western estimates of some 100,000 Russian troops near Ukraine is increasing worries that a offensive could be days away. At the same time, borders of the NATO alliance are also being shored up.

FRANCE MAKES A BIG MOVE

Even if the 27-nation European Union as bloc has had little impact on the crisis, France has always felt it could force a breakthrough in the East-West stalemate, and Macron is the epitome of that confidence.

Moscow is only the first of a one-two diplomatic dance that will take him to Kyiv on Tuesday. His priority is simple — “dialogue with Russia and de-escalation.”

What makes execution much more complicated is the need to keep a unified Western front consisting of over two dozen players in the face of the Kremlin monolith, where one man’s will faces precious little opposition.

Macron’s essential challenge is make sure things don’t get worse on the ground “before building confidence gestures and mechanisms.” In an interview with French newspaper Journal du Dimanche, he said Putin might make Ukraine only a means to achieve a bigger goal.

“The geopolitical objective of Russia today is clearly not Ukraine, but to clarify the rules of cohabitation with NATO and the EU,” Macron said. Even if Ukraine’ security cannot be a bargaining chip, Macron said “it is also legitimate for Russia to pose the question of its own security.”

AFTER FRENCH MOVE, SO DOES GERMANY

France and Germany have worked in tandem before. Seven years ago, they were essential in creating a peace deal for eastern Ukraine in a bid to end the hostilities between Ukrainian forces and Russia-backed separatists that erupted in 2014 following the Russian annexation of Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula.

Germany has been criticized for being slow and halfhearted in its approach to the Ukraine crisis but on Monday, Europe’s economic juggernaut was moving on different fronts. As Chancellor Schulz was preparing his meeting with Biden, Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock has meetings scheduled in Kyiv with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and is set to visit the “line of contact” with pro-Russia separatists in eastern Ukraine on Tuesday.

Germany’s show of solidarity amid tensions over Berlin’s refusal to send weapons. Yet Baerbock said that “we stand — without ifs or buts — by the territorial integrity of the country and at the side of people in Ukraine.”

Baerbock added that “together, we will react with hard and very concrete measures to any further Russian aggression against Ukraine.”

MORE TROOPS ON NATO’S EASTERN FRONT

Germany is also mulling sending more troops to Lithuania, potentially reinforcing its presence on NATO’s eastern flank. Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht has raised the possibility ahead of Scholz’s meeting with Biden. The German leader is due to receive on Thursday the leaders of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, the three Baltic states who specifically feel the heat from Moscow, before traveling to Ukraine and Russia next week. Germany has led a NATO battlegroup in Lithuania for the past five years.

A few dozen elite U.S troops and equipment were seen landing Sunday in southeastern Poland near the border with Ukraine, following President Joe Biden’s orders to deploy 1,700 soldiers there amid fears of a Russian invasion of Ukraine.

	Hundreds more infantry troops of the 82nd Airborne Division are still expected to arrive at the Rzeszow-Jasionka airport, 90 kilometers (56 miles) from Poland's border with Ukraine. A U.S. Air Force Boeing C-17 Globemaster plane brought a few dozen troops and vehicles.
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HEADLINE	02/05 King Co. official: pandemic vs. endemic
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3337381/health-officer-duchin-pandemic-vs-endemic/
GIST	<p>In King County — and across much of Western Washington — COVID case numbers are falling.</p> <p>Health Officer Dr. Jeff Duchin said Thursday he hopes this decline continues, and that the region “can move to a more sustainable and less disruptive long-term strategy to limit the harm from this virus.”</p> <p>“But for right now, there’s still a whole lot of COVID-19 going on,” he said.</p> <p>While cases and hospitalizations have been falling since Jan. 10, Duchin says these numbers are still very high in King County. In January, people who are not fully vaccinated were twice as likely to have a COVID-19 infection, 13 times more likely to be hospitalized, and 16 times more likely to die from COVID.</p> <p>“Our vaccines, especially with the booster dose, are continuing to provide most people with excellent protection from serious infections,” Duchin said.</p> <p>In addition to vaccinations and boosters, Duchin spoke to the continued importance of COVID precautions — including wearing masks, avoiding crowded and poorly ventilated indoor spaces, isolating from others when you are sick, and getting tested if possible when you have symptoms or have been exposed to someone with COVID.</p> <p>“Together, these strategies, these layers provide the additive level of protection that we need for this time while we have such high levels of COVID-19 continuing to circulate in the community,” he said.</p> <p>Pandemic vs endemic</p> <p>After recapping the numbers, Duchin switched gears to address the discussion surrounding a shift to an “endemic” stage, where COVID would become more like the seasonal flu.</p> <p>“When people talk about the COVID pandemic ending and COVID becoming endemic, I think what they’re really saying is they believe the worst is behind us,” he said. “And there are good reasons why that may be true, and I hope more than anything that it is. It’s not a certainty.”</p> <p>“We shouldn’t assume that a variant that’s worse than delta, or worse than omicron won’t emerge in the future,” he said. “The transition from pandemic to endemic will not happen suddenly or by decree, but gradually, as we move from a new, emerging, and unfamiliar, highly unpredictable pandemic, to an endemic state that is more predictable with respect to the virus’ virulence and its occurrence over time.”</p> <p>The timeline for this transition and what the endemic state will look like, however, are unknown, and will be influenced by a number of factors, Duchin says, including how the virus evolves, new variants, and how well immunity from vaccination and infection holds up.</p> <p>“But the term endemic doesn’t really help us know what we can expect with respect to severity of illness, frequency of surges, seasonal patterns, or overall impact on the population,” he said. “What it does do is imply a more predictable range of illness, occurrence, and impacts. We just don’t know with much certainty yet what that state will look like.”</p> <p>“So from my perspective, the pandemic versus endemic terminology debate is of little practical value, and can even be counterproductive if it leads to complacency by implying the outbreak is over, or by equating</p>

	<p>endemic with relatively mild or not serious, or to the failure to plan and take the necessary steps that we need to take to help us live with COVID-19 with the least disruption and impact on our health, our economy, and our society over the long-term,” he added.</p> <p>Duchin says we should instead be focusing our energy on protecting ourselves and our community given our current reality and the unpredictability regarding how COVID will evolve.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/06 Lessons: 1918 flu beyond 1918; third year
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2022/02/06/1918-flu-fourth-wave/
GIST	<p>In New York City in 1920 — nearly two years into a deadly influenza pandemic that would claim at least 50 million lives worldwide — the new year began on a bright note.</p> <p>“Best Health Report for City in 53 Years,” boasted a headline in the New York Times on Jan. 4, 1920, after New York had survived three devastating waves of the flu virus. The nation as a whole, which would ultimately lose 675,000 people to the disease, believed that the end might finally be in sight.</p> <p>Within a few weeks, however, those optimistic headlines began to change. Before the end of the month, New York City would experience a surge in influenza cases. Chicago and other urban centers reported the same.</p> <p>Residents should prepare themselves for an “influenza return,” New York City health commissioner Royal S. Copeland warned. He predicted that the virus variant responsible for the surge would be milder and that those who had fallen ill the previous year would be immune. He was wrong, at least in part: While many places worldwide did not see a fourth wave of the great influenza pandemic, several metropolises — including New York City, Chicago and Detroit — had another deadly season in store.</p> <p>As the coronavirus pandemic creeps into its third year, and the death toll in the United States reaches 900,000, the 1918 influenza pandemic can offer some insight into how this chapter of history might draw to a close. But an “ending,” when it comes to viruses such as these, is a misleading word. Eventually, experts say, the novel coronavirus is likely to transition from a deadly and disruptive pathogen to a milder, more seasonal nuisance.</p> <p>In the meantime, though, the country’s experience a century ago suggests that we could be in for a lot more pain — especially if we let our guard down.</p> <p>The 1918 flu lasted far beyond 1918. Two years after it began, just as officials such as Copeland were declaring victory and cities were easing restrictions, a fourth wave hit parts of the country, bringing punishing caseloads that pushed some hospitals to the brink of collapse and left many more Americans dead.</p> <p>The virus did not seem so menacing when it began: The first wave in the spring of 1918 was relatively mild. But it returned with a vengeance in the fall, probably having mutated. That second wave burned through patients around the world. Street cars were converted into hearses, and priests collected bodies with horse-drawn carriages.</p> <p>During the second wave alone, more Americans were killed by the flu than died in the First World War, the Second World War, the Korean War and the Vietnam War combined.</p> <p>The flu pandemic seemed to affect young people in particular, for reasons that historians and scientists are still debating. When the first recorded cases arrived, World War I was raging, and the cramped conditions of the trenches meant that the virus could pass rapidly from soldier to soldier, and the conditions in field hospitals often hastened the spread. Other experts have suggested that people in their 20s and 30s were less likely to have prior immunity to similar flu viruses.</p>

Regardless, the virus alone lowered life expectancy in the United States by more than 12 years. As many as 10 percent of all young adults living through the time of the flu pandemic may have died of it, according to historian John M. Barry in his book [“The Great Influenza.”](#)

By the winter of 1919-1920, Americans were weary of the limitations on daily life. Nearly all of the public health restrictions — such as [mask-wearing](#), social distancing and the closure of schools and churches — had been lifted. A hasty return to public gatherings led to an increase in case numbers. Politicians either blamed people’s carelessness for the reemergence of the virus or [downplayed the seriousness of it](#).

The fourth wave was not front-page news in the way that prior spikes had been. The coverage was often relegated to small paragraphs deep inside newspapers, reporting thousands of new cases on a weekly or even daily basis. By February 1920, there was an epidemic in a [state prison in New Jersey](#), and some courts were forced to halt proceedings because of illness.

One physician wrote a letter to the editor in the New York Times in the winter of 1920, begging people to avoid [“needless exposure to influenza”](#) through unnecessary social contact. The doctor warned that anyone who visited someone who was ill was then “capable of spreading the disease to any number of others who might have escaped, thereby putting an extra drain upon the already overburdened hospitals, nurses, and doctors.”

But if the fourth wave failed to generate the kinds of headlines and fear of its predecessors, it wasn’t for a lack of lethality. In New York City, more people died in the period from December 1919 to April 1920 than in the first and third waves, according to a research paper on [influenza mortality in the city](#). Detroit, St. Louis and Minneapolis also experienced significant fourth waves, and severe [“excess mortality”](#) was reported in many counties in Michigan because of the flu.

Local governments’ public health interventions actually may have contributed to the fourth wave by limiting the virus’s spread in prior waves. Letting the virus run rampant, however, would not have been advisable either, said Wan Yang, an assistant professor of epidemiology at Columbia University and an author of the paper on New York City influenza mortality. “More infection could also lead to more mutation, so that could generate a new virus variant that can then erode your prior immunity, so it’s an interplay depending on how the virus is going to evolve, which is really unpredictable,” Yang said.

Influenza viruses and [coronaviruses](#) are genetically different, so it’s not possible to make a one-to-one comparison with the 1918 pandemic. Yang noted that the novel coronavirus appears to mutate far faster than the 1918 influenza virus. Management of the current pandemic also has benefited from many scientific developments that were not available a century ago, including more-sanitary hospital conditions, better access to clean water, and — perhaps what is most notable — a vaccine.

Still, we can get a glimpse into our future by looking at the past. The 1918 flu virus, after lingering in a deadly form for more than two years, eventually grew milder. Now it is “part of every seasonal flu we have,” said Ann Reid, the executive director of the National Center for Science Education, who helped sequence the genome of the 1918 influenza virus in the 1990s. Her research found that some genetic aspects of the 1918 virus continued to be present in new outbreaks, including pandemics in 1957 and 1968. People with immunity to the 1918 virus were therefore likely to have some protection from its genetic cousins.

“Eventually, everyone in the world will have some base level of immunity to this coronavirus, so even when it mutates into a new strain, people won’t be entirely vulnerable to it,” Reid said.

The best we can hope for with the current pandemic is an evolution that is to the flu virus’s. “I think it’s going to stay,” Yang said of the novel coronavirus. “I don’t think elimination is feasible or even realistic at this point. Hopefully we can live more peacefully with this virus.”

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SOURCE	https://time.com/6145580/u-s-inflation/
GIST	<p>Inflationary pressures in the U.S. continued to heat up at the start of the year, data are expected to show, likely putting a Federal Reserve interest-rate increase next month on autopilot.</p> <p>The consumer price index probably jumped 7.3% in January from a year ago, the largest annual advance since early 1982, according to the median projection in a Bloomberg survey of economists. Excluding volatile energy and food categories, the CPI is projected to have risen 5.9%.</p> <p>The inflation data follow the government's latest employment report, which showed newfound momentum in the labor market and faster wage growth that spurred bets that the Fed will be more aggressive in raising rates.</p> <p>It's a light week for Fed-speak, with only the Cleveland Fed's Loretta Mester and Governor Michelle Bowman scheduled, both on Wednesday. Mester's an FOMC voter this year and Bowman will be the first governor to make public remarks since Chair Jerome Powell's press conference on Jan. 26.</p> <p>The relative silence from Washington probably reflects the fact that both Powell and Governor Lael Brainard await Senate confirmation — Powell for another four years at the helm, and Brainard to become vice chair.</p> <p>The Senate Banking Committee expects to vote on them Feb. 15, together with President Joe Biden's three nominees to join the Fed's Board of Governors: Lisa Cook, Sarah Bloom Raskin and Philip Jefferson. All five will then require confirmation by the full Senate.</p> <p>What Bloomberg Economics Says:</p> <p>“With energy and food prices still rising, Bloomberg Economics estimates that January inflation continued to exceed the average monthly run rate consistent with an annual 2% inflation target. We expect inflation to peak in February. Slightly more reassuring is that elevated inflation has not seemed to cause long-term inflation expectations to unanchor yet.”</p> <p>—Anna Wong, Yelena Shulyateva, Andrew Husby and Eliza Winger.</p> <p>Elsewhere, Russia's central bank may increase rates by 100 basis points, perhaps the biggest move in another week of anticipated global tightening by monetary officials from Poland to Peru.</p> <p>Asia</p> <p>Japan releases household spending figures on Tuesday that could show the early impact of omicron fears on private consumption, one of the final pieces of data for quarterly GDP out the following week.</p> <p>Wages will likely show continued meager gains as Prime Minister Fumio Kishida tries to lift pay in a wider swathe of the world's third-largest economy.</p> <p>Australian business and consumer confidence reports will give a check on the mood Down Under as the RBA ends its bond-buying program on Thursday, following the decision to upgrade its outlook for inflation and employment.</p> <p>India and Thailand have central bank meetings on Wednesday, and Indonesia follows on Thursday.</p> <p>As China returns from its week-long Lunar New Year holiday, investors will scrutinize spending figures to take the pulse of consumers in the world's second-largest economy.</p> <p>Inflation in the world's second-largest economy will remain modest in 2022, China's top economic planner said Sunday, if shifting monetary policies elsewhere weaken the rally in global commodities.</p> <p>Europe, Middle East, Africa</p>

	<p>Governor Andrew Bailey will speak on Thursday, following the Bank of England's first back-to-back rate increases since 2004. He may explain his vote to block an even bigger hike, and could perhaps clarify comments urging pay restraint that drew a rebuke from Prime Minister Boris Johnson's office.</p> <p>On Friday, gross domestic product data will show how the U.K. economy weathered the first full month of the coronavirus omicron variant, with new growth numbers for December. Economists predict a third consecutive quarter of expansion to end 2021, with a median forecast of 1.1%.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/06 Guilty plea reveals huge refugee fraud ring
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/6/fraud-p-2-iraqi-refugee-program-revealed-aws-abdul/
GIST	<p>A special program giving Iraqi refugees direct access to the U.S. remains shut down a year after authorities revealed a massive fraud ring operating inside the government, and new court documents are shedding light on just how bad the situation was.</p> <p>Aws Abduljabbar, an Iraqi man who had been living in Jordan, pleaded guilty last week to running the fraud ring. He admitted that he paid two Homeland Security Department employees to steal files from the government's refugee database. He then used those files to coach would-be refugees on how to rewrite their cases to make them more sympathetic and more likely to win approval, prosecutors said.</p> <p>The scam likely touched thousands of cases over eight years or so and forced the State Department in January 2021 to suspend the P-2 Iraqi refugee program, as it's known. What was originally supposed to be a 90-day pause has stretched to more than a year as the Biden administration tries to cauterize the wound.</p> <p>In the meantime, legitimate refugee candidates likely have been stranded.</p> <p>It wasn't just the refugee program that Abduljabbar was scamming.</p> <p>As they were building the case against him, investigators discovered Abduljabbar was also orchestrating a marriage fraud operation, a sort of backup plan for those who failed to get into the U.S. as a refugee or some other way. Agents said in court documents that the operation charged tens of thousands of dollars to arrange fake relationships for Iraqis and Jordanians to give them a path to the U.S.</p> <p>Abduljabbar was running another immigration scam that bought bogus Guatemalan passports for Iraqis to try to cheat their way into the U.S.</p> <p>The refugee scam, which he said in his plea deal he ran with at least two accomplices, highlights the potential danger lurking in the Biden administration's Afghanistan airlift, which brought 76,000 evacuees to the U.S. without full checks.</p> <p>"You can't rely on the legitimacy of what is being presented, and if you do not take the time to sort things out, you, in a worst-case scenario, allow in a terrorist. In a bad situation, you give out an immigration benefit to someone who is ineligible for it," said Rob Law, who ran the office of policy and strategy at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services in the Trump administration.</p> <p>That bad scenario is what looks to have happened in the Iraqi refugee program with Abduljabbar, 43, who found a way to access secret files detailing the inner workings of hundreds of cases.</p> <p>According to his plea, the operation continued for years.</p> <p>He said he paid a Jordanian man who worked for USCIS at the U.S. Embassy in Amman to pore over files in the agency's refugee system and pull out cases and details of Iraqis. That man's time at USCIS ended in 2016, but he managed to get into the computer system remotely, and illegally, for months afterward.</p>

By then, the man had recruited another henchman for Abduljabbar — a Russian woman who worked at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow who pulled the files for them.

From 2016 to 2019, the Russian woman stole access into at least 591 cases involving Iraqis applying for the P-2 program. She sent hundreds of screenshots and documents to Abduljabbar so he could keep tabs on those cases.

That knowledge helped him coach Iraqis on how to shape their applications. He provided inside information on what questions might be asked in interviews and what stories worked and what didn't.

"As a result, the State Department, DHS and other agencies will spend millions of dollars to investigate and mitigate the damage," prosecutors and Abduljabbar said in the statement of facts supporting his plea deal. "Among other tasks, this continuing effort involves the identification of [refugee] cases affected by the scheme, review of all cases to identify fraud and/or previously unidentified security risks, and an array of subsequent remedial steps."

Reuters reported last summer that authorities suspect the fraud scheme tainted about 4,000 refugee cases. More than 500 won their cases and were admitted to the U.S.

Reuters said investigators found no connections to terrorism in the cases. Still, the Justice Department, announcing the guilty plea last week, said the fraud ring was a risk "to public safety and national security" and potentially blocked legitimate refugees whose lives were in danger.

USCIS declined to comment on the matter.

The State Department said it couldn't comment on the case against Abduljabbar and the other two people, but it confirmed that the P-2 program is still shut down.

"We continue working as quickly as possible to complete our review and implement any additional safeguards to resume processing as soon as practical," the department said in a statement to The Times.

The department said refugee applicants "undergo rigorous security screening and vetting."

"In the admission of refugees to the United States, the safety and security of the American people is our top priority," the department said.

Yet hiccups in the program are piling up.

Mr. Law said the fact that foreigners working for USCIS were given such extensive access to sensitive systems exposed a serious flaw in the agency's approach.

The government has vowed "accountability" for those found to have engaged in fraud, but Mr. Law was skeptical.

"The cynic in me sees the Biden administration really has no desire to vet and screen," he said. "My concern is that it's one of those things where if you were a beneficiary of this fraud, you're going to keep it. There's not going to be an effort to go back and claw it back."

The P-2 program was supposed to reward people in danger because they assisted with American efforts surrounding the war in Iraq.

Refugees accepted by the U.S. generally have fled their home countries, fear returning and are referred to the U.S. by the United Nations Refugee Agency. But the P-2 program, also known as "direct access," allows people to apply from their home countries without undergoing U.N. vetting.

In August, the State Department announced that Afghans who assisted the U.S. effort in their country also would be eligible for speedy refugee processing.

The Iraqi fraud experience made many experts worry about the expansion for Afghans.

The vetting process is supposed to be long and involve whatever checks the government can make, Mr. Law said.

Short-circuiting those checks — such as bringing folks to the U.S. without undergoing interviews, as happened in the cases of most of the Afghan evacuees — is one way to let in people who didn't earn refugee status or who might be bad actors.

Court documents indicate that some people Abduljabbar was trying to help were blocked from the P-2 refugee program, but he had other scams to help them reach the U.S.

One was working with corrupt Guatemalan officials to buy bogus passports for Iraqis. The Iraqis would use the passports to get into Mexico and head for the U.S. border. The fraudsters charged about \$10,000 for the fabricated documents, investigators said in court documents.

Abduljabbar was also involved in a marriage fraud ring, which tried to arrange bogus relationships between people from Iraq or Jordan and U.S. citizens.

Court documents show that agents tipped to those two scams as a result of sniffing out the original refugee fraud.

Agents monitoring Abduljabbar's communications from jail even heard details of his attempt to secure a fake marriage for himself, despite having a wife in Jordan. The plan was to secure a "divorce document temporarily issued in Baghdad" and then proceed with a bogus marriage to an American, according to court documents.

As part of the guilty plea agreement, government attorneys agreed not to pursue the case against Abduljabbar in those other scams, which are being prosecuted in federal court in California against his suspected conspirators.

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HEADLINE	02/06 UK Queen celebrates 70; succession 'wish'
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/6/queen-marks-70th-anniversary-with-support-for-cami/
GIST	<p>LONDON — As the United Kingdom marked the 70th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth II's rule on Sunday, the queen looked to the future of the monarchy.</p> <p>In remarks delivered in time for Sunday morning's front pages, the queen expressed a "sincere wish" that Prince Charles' wife, Camilla, should be known as "Queen Consort" when her son succeeds her as expected. With those words the monarch sought to answer once and for all questions about the status of Camilla, who was initially shunned by fans of the late Princess Diana, Charles' first wife.</p> <p>"The queen is such a realist and, you know, she's got a business to run," historian Robert Lacey said. "Well, they call it 'The Firm,' don't they? And this really brings Camilla into the firm properly now and for the future."</p> <p>It took years for many in Britain to forgive Charles, whose admitted infidelity and long-time links to Camilla torpedoed his marriage to Diana. The popular, glamorous princess died in a Paris car crash in 1997, five years after the couple separated in a messy public split. But the public mood has softened since Charles married Camilla Parker Bowles in 2005.</p>

Now known as the Duchess of Cornwall, the 74-year-old Camilla has taken on roles at more than 100 charities, focusing on a wide range of issues including promoting literacy, supporting victims of domestic violence and helping the elderly.

Her down-to-earth style and sense of humor eventually won over many Britons. Her warmth softened Charles' stuffy image and made him appear more approachable, if not happier, as he cut ribbons, unveiled plaques and waited for his chance to reign.

Charles, 73, has long made it clear that he wants Camilla to be known as queen when he ultimately succeeds his mother on the throne. In his own message congratulating the queen on her long years of service, Charles thanked his mother for her support.

"We are deeply conscious of the honour represented by my mother's wish," they said. "As we have sought together to serve and support Her Majesty and the people of our communities, my darling wife has been my own steadfast support throughout."

The queen's comments are remarkable in that they brought back memories of one of the lowest moments of her 70 years on the throne. The royal family was widely criticized for its initial silence in the aftermath of Diana's death, with one national newspaper proclaiming "Your People Are Suffering. Speak to Us Ma'am."

In backing Charles and Camilla, the queen remembered the support she received from her husband, Prince Philip, who died last year after decades at her side, as well as the role her mother played as the wife of a king.

"I am fortunate to have had the steadfast and loving support of my family. I was blessed that, in Prince Philip, I had a partner willing to carry out the role of consort and unselfishly make the sacrifices that go with it," she wrote. "It is a role I saw my own mother perform during my father's reign."

"And when, in the fullness of time, my son Charles becomes King, I know you will give him and his wife Camilla the same support that you have given me."

But for now, the queen remains at work.

On Sunday, Buckingham Palace released a photo of the monarch sitting in front of her official red dispatch box with government papers spread out before her.

The 95-year-old monarch is expected to spend the day at Sandringham, the country estate in Norfolk where her father, King George VI, died suddenly on Feb. 6, 1952, making her queen.

"It is a sad day and one that reminds her of the close relationship she had with him," said Lacey, the historical consultant to the Netflix series "The Crown."

"(Sunday) is a day when, by tradition, she likes to go back to Sandringham, the country roots of the family," he told The Associated Press. "He liked to consider himself the Squire of Sandringham, the King of Britain, but he'd go out and walk the fields, shoot the game. That's what she remembers."

While Sunday's anniversary is expected to be low-key, public celebrations of the monarch's platinum jubilee are scheduled for June, when the weather improves. The festivities will include a military parade, neighborhood parties and a competition to create a new dessert - a mini extravaganza that will take place over a special four-day weekend June 2-5.

The celebrations are meant to recognize the woman who became a symbol of stability for the U.K. as it navigated an age of uncertainty.

Britain's longest-serving monarch, the only sovereign most Britons have ever known, she has been a constant presence as Britain navigated the end of empire, the swinging '60s, the labor strife of the 1980s, international terrorism, Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic.

In her message, the queen promised to keep working for the U.K. and the Commonwealth.

"As we mark this anniversary, it gives me pleasure to renew to you the pledge I gave in 1947 that my life will always be devoted to your service," she wrote.

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HEADLINE	02/06 Germany to reinforce Lithuania force
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/06/ukraine-germany-to-beef-up-lithuania-force-as-scholz-begins-diplomatic-blitz
GIST	<p>Germany is preparing to send reinforcements to its battle group in Lithuania as the chancellor, Olaf Scholz, headed to Washington to reassure Nato allies his country can be relied upon over the Ukraine crisis.</p> <p>Tentative planning for a further deployment of German military force follows weeks of criticism of Berlin's approach to Russia's mobilisation of 145,000 troops on the border with Ukraine.</p> <p>The German government has refused to act on Kyiv's calls for arms and has been vague over the future of the Russian Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline to Germany in the event of an incursion over the Ukrainian border.</p> <p>But in an interview with the Funke media group, Germany's defence minister, Christine Lambrecht, emphasised her government's continuing military commitment on Nato's eastern flank.</p> <p>"We [Germany] are already making a very important contribution in Lithuania, where we are the only country in the European Union to have a battle group," she said. "As a matter of principle, additional troops are available as reinforcement, and we are in talks with Lithuania at the moment to find out what exactly would make sense in this regard ... Everyone in Nato can rely on us."</p> <p>Since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, there have been four battle groups containing a total of 5,000 troops in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland led by the US, Germany, Canada and Britain. Germany provides about half of the 1,200 Nato troops in Lithuania.</p> <p>The US has ordered a further 3,000 troops to strengthen Nato's eastern allies, with the first arriving on Saturday at Rzeszów military base in south-eastern Poland. On Sunday, 300 troops from the US 18th Airborne Corps arrived in Wiesbaden, Germany.</p> <p>As discussions over troop reinforcements continue, the German government will go on a diplomatic foray this week, with Scholz due at the White House on Monday and Germany's foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, expected in Ukraine on Monday and Tuesday, where she will inspect the frontline between Ukrainian troops and areas held by Russian-based separatists.</p> <p>Following a meeting with the US president, Joe Biden, Scholz will also welcome heads of state and government of the Baltic states to Berlin on Thursday to discuss the security situation in eastern Europe.</p> <p>On Sunday evening, in an interview with the ARD broadcaster, Scholz said Germany was open to boosting troop numbers. "We are ... prepared to do whatever is necessary to strengthen" Germany's presence in Nato operations in the Baltics, he said.</p> <p>A frenetic period of diplomatic activity is under way, with Moscow believed by US intelligence to have now assembled at least 70% of the firepower it needs to launch a major military operation by mid-February.</p>

On Sunday, the White House's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, said an attack could be launched as soon as Monday or come weeks down the line. Before Scholz's visit, he also emphasised that he believed Nord Stream 2 would not go forward in the event of an incursion.

Scholz, who took over from Angela Merkel in December, is due to visit Ukraine on 14 February and the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, at the Kremlin the next day. The French president, Emmanuel Macron, is seeing Putin on Monday, while the British foreign secretary, Liz Truss, will see her Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov in Moscow this week, the first such visit for four years.

Last week, Fiona Hill, a former US intelligence officer on Russia and Eurasian affairs, told a congressional hearing that Putin "already has had something of a win because he's got our undivided attention and part of the exercise was clearly to get us to focus on him".

EU diplomats concede that Putin has also been successful in highlighting fissures in the west's approach, with the bloc's leadership left out of the top-table peace talks and clear breaches emerging in a common line on the crisis.

Last week while seeing Putin in Moscow, Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orbán, cast himself as a longtime ally of the Russian leader, informing the Kremlin that the EU was "ready for a reasonable agreement".

In an interview published on Sunday, Lambrecht, who became defence minister in December, defended Germany's attitude, including the rejection of a request from Kyiv for missile defence systems, tools for electronic warfare, night-vision goggles, digital radios, radar stations and military ambulances. The German government was widely mocked for instead sending 5,000 protective helmets and a field hospital.

Lambrecht said: "It has long been the clear stance of the federal government, even in previous legislative periods, that we do not deliver weapons to crisis areas in order not to escalate further there.

"In the Ukraine conflict we have negotiating partners who have come back to the negotiating table ... That is why it is now our task to de-escalate. We want to resolve this conflict peacefully."

Scholz has said the future of Nord Stream 2 will be on the table as part of a package of economic sanctions in the event of a Russian incursion into Ukrainian territory, but he has been shy of making any stronger statements in public.

Last week, Ursula von der Leyen, the European Commission president, appeared to follow the US administration's lead in trying to box Berlin in on the issue. "Nord Stream 2 cannot be excluded from the sanctions list, that is very clear," she said.

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HEADLINE	02/06 Winter Olympics litany of athlete complaints
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2022/feb/06/i-have-no-more-tears-beijing-winter-olympics-hit-by-athlete-complaints
GIST	<p>On the eve of the Winter Olympics, China promised the world a "streamlined, safe and most splendid" Games. But just two days into the event organisers are facing a litany of complaints from athletes and countries on multiple fronts.</p> <p>The Swedes have suggested that the conditions in the mountains are perilously cold. A Polish skater says she was living in fear in a Beijing isolation ward and has "cried until I have no more tears". The Finns have claimed an ice hockey player is being kept in Covid quarantine for no reason. And the Germans? They are frustrated that there is no hot food at the downhill skiing.</p>

Athletes were always going to face difficulties in Beijing, given they are in a “closed loop” system that forbids them from leaving the village except to train, compete or go home. However, a growing number are now expressing frustration and anguish with other aspects of their Winter Olympic experience.

Plummeting temperatures are usually a given at the Games, but the Swedish delegation are urging cross-country skiing events to be held earlier in the day after one athlete, Frida Karlsson, was seen shaking and close to collapse at the end of the women’s 7.5km+7.5km skiathlon.

Under the rules of the International Ski Federation (FIS), competitions are stopped from taking place when temperatures are below -20c. When Karlsson competed on Saturday, temperatures at the National Cross-Country Centre in the mountains of Zhangjiakou, 130 miles north-west of Beijing, were -13C – but with windchill it was far colder.

“We have the cold limits but I do not know if they also measure the wind effect,” the Swedish team boss Anders Bystroem told reporters. “If FIS says it’s -17 degrees and it’s windy, and it’s -35 degrees with the wind chill, what do you do then?”

The Swede called for Tuesday’s women’s sprint race to be moved earlier in the day because of the freezing temperatures. “The skiathlon started at 4pm and Frida Karlsson was completely destroyed by the cold. It’s not good that the sprint starts even later,” he added.

Meanwhile the Polish speed skater Natalia Maliszewska, who was forced to miss the 500m short track event on Saturday, revealed that she had faced fear and uncertainty in a Beijing isolation ward after testing positive for Covid.

“Since a week I have been living in fear and these changes in mood,” she said. “I cry until I have no more tears and make not only the people around me worry but myself too,” she said.

Those in an isolation ward are allowed out if they are free of symptoms and have two negative Covid tests 24 hours apart and Maliszewska was eventually released back to the Olympic village – before being told there had been a mistake.

“People got me out of my room at 3am,” she said. “This night was a horror, I slept in my clothes in my bed because I was afraid that at any moment someone would take me back to isolation. Then a message that unfortunately they were mistaken, that I am a threat, and should not have been released from isolation.

“I have to get back to the Olympic Village as soon as possible,” she added. “I can’t understand this anymore. I no longer believe in any tests, any Olympics. To me this is a big joke, I hope whoever is managing this has a lot of fun. My heart and my mind can’t take this anymore.”

More than 350 Games participants, including dozens of athletes, have tested positive upon arrival in the Chinese capital since 23 January. Many are still in isolation, fearing their Games are over.

One of those is the Finnish ice hockey player Marko Anttila, whose team believes he is being kept in Covid-19 isolation for no reason. “From a medical perspective we know that a person like this is no longer infectious, no danger to the other team,” Finnish doctor Maarit Valtonen said. “These isolation decisions are not based on medicine or science, it’s more cultural and political decisions.”

The Finland head coach Jukka Jalonen said that the situation was affecting Anttila’s mental health. “We know that he’s fully healthy and that’s why we think that China, for some reason, won’t respect his human rights and that’s not a great situation,” he added.

The Russian biathlon competitor Valeria Vasnetsova also recently expressed her experiences of being in a quarantine hotel, posting on Instagram: “My stomach hurts, I’m very pale and I have huge black circles around my eyes. I want all this to end. I cry every day. I’m very tired.”

	<p>Vasnetsova posted a picture of what she said was “breakfast, lunch and dinner for five days already” – a tray with food including plain pasta, an orange sauce, a piece of meat on a bone, a few potatoes and no greens.</p> <p>Meanwhile, after the men’s downhill was postponed until Monday due to high winds, Germany’s coach Christian Schwaiger lamented there was no hot food available for athletes. “The catering is extremely questionable, because really it’s not catering at all,” he said. “I would have expected that the Olympic Committee is capable of providing hot meals. There are crisps, some nuts and chocolate and nothing else.”</p> <p>The IOC said it was aware of the complaint and was working with Beijing 2022 to address the issues. Asked about the situation in the Covid hotels, the IOC added: “We feel for every athlete who cannot compete because of a Covid-19 infection. The protocols have been put in place to ensure safe Olympic Games for everyone.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/07 Austria: 9 killed 3 days over 100 avalanches
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/05/eight-killed-in-two-days-after-third-deadly-avalanche-hits-austria
GIST	<p>Nine people died in three days during which more than 100 avalanches struck Austria, authorities said Sunday, as heavy snowfall followed by warmer weather made for unusually dangerous conditions.</p> <p>Most of the avalanches hit the western Tyrol region and Friday alone saw five fatalities, rescue services said.</p> <p>Police said that one incident had claimed the lives of a group of Swedish skiers going off-piste with a mountain guide in the zone around Ischgl, near the Swiss border.</p> <p>The guide and four of the group were swept away with just one member surviving. He managed to call for help and was airlifted out by helicopter.</p> <p>Also Friday, a man aged 60 and his 61-year-old wife were engulfed while cross-country skiing near the village of Auffach, Tyrol police said.</p> <p>Saturday then saw an Austrian aged 58 killed at Schmirn near Innsbruck in an avalanche which injured four others.</p> <p>Further west, an experienced skier of 43 was killed in the popular Vorarlberg region as Austria saw exceptional quantities of snowfall going into and across the weekend.</p> <p>Five winter sports enthusiasts were buried by snowfall in the major resort of Soelden but were all rescued.</p> <p>“The past three days have seen some 100 avalanche-type incidents requiring 70 interventions,” Tyrol regional authorities said Sunday, dubbing the situation “unprecedented” and warning of more to come.</p> <p>Recent years have seen avalanches claim around 20 lives a year in Austria, fewer over the past two years after the pandemic vastly reduced the numbers of skiers.</p> <p>In neighbouring Switzerland, an avalanche in Reckingen in the south-eastern Wallis region killed a 68-year-old on Saturday, while a second person was injured, police said.</p> <p>The two were part of a group of four Italian hikers and were quickly found and freed from the snow by the other two. One died at the scene and the other was airlifted to hospital.</p>

	<p>According to a provisional report by the MeteoSwiss weather service on Friday, people have been caught up in 45 avalanches so far this winter.</p> <p>It urged people to be “careful, careful, careful”.</p> <p>On Thursday, one person died and several others were injured in avalanches in Switzerland’s Graubunden region, which borders Austria’s Tyrol.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/06 Covid: highest death toll, highest death rate
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/06/us-covid-death-rate-vaccines
GIST	<p>The US has suffered 900,000 deaths from Covid-19, the highest figure of any nation. The death toll would be equivalent to the 15th most populous city in the country, more than San Francisco, Washington DC or Boston – a city of ghosts with its population swelling each day.</p> <p>It’s not just the total numbers. America also has the highest death rate of any wealthy country, with half of the deaths occurring after vaccines became available.</p> <p>The US has never responded to the Covid pandemic in a sustained, proactive way as a unified nation. Instead, much of the responsibility – and blame – has fallen on individuals. In a country with vast income inequality, poor health and sharp political divides, the results have been grim.</p> <p>“All of those factors put people at higher risk of Covid death,” said Megan Ranney, emergency physician and academic dean of public health at Brown University.</p> <p>Vaccinations, in particular, have lagged, especially compared with other wealthy countries. The health system was already precarious when it began to be battered by wave after wave of Covid.</p> <p>Other countries with similarly high death tolls earlier in the pandemic have seen fewer fatalities from the Omicron variant – yet in the US, the Omicron death toll is surpassing the Delta wave of autumn 2021. Last month was one of the deadliest of the entire pandemic.</p> <p>Meanwhile, American leaders are attempting to mimic other countries’ return to normal, despite a markedly different situation with hospitalizations and deaths – which, every day, nearly reach the losses from the September 11 terrorist attacks.</p> <p>“The first and most obvious [issue] is our vaccination and booster rate,” said Ranney. “Our rate of vaccination, period, is lower than in most other high-income countries, and our booster rate is lower as well. And as ample CDC data proves, vaccines and boosters are tremendously effective at protecting against death, even with Omicron.”</p> <p>Less than two-thirds – about 64% – of Americans are vaccinated, and only 48% of those are boosted, despite ample vaccine supply.</p> <p>“For a country which has a vaccines-only strategy, we’re not very good at vaccination,” said William Hanage, associate professor of epidemiology at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health and co-director of the Center on Communicable Disease Dynamics. “There are large parts of the country which are not vaccinated to higher levels ... and that’s made worse by the fact that with Omicron, to get really good protection, you also need to be boosted.”</p> <p>Problems with access to vaccines linger, too. Better-off people have had plenty of opportunities to be vaccinated, but those in poorer households still struggle to get vaccines – and time off to recover from any side effects. Some 15% to 20% of unvaccinated Americans say they are still interested in getting their shots, Hanage said – they simply haven’t been able to yet.</p>

Meanwhile, poorer unvaccinated people also face a “double whammy” because they are also more likely to contract Covid, he said.

“You have people who are more likely to be exposed to the virus, who are less likely to receive vaccines, who are less likely to be able to take steps to protect themselves even with vaccination, because they’re scared of missing a paycheck, they’re scared of taking a day off, their employer won’t let them.”

The US is the most [economically unequal](#) of G7 countries, and it offers no guaranteed sick leave.

“The absence of paid sick leave is an absolute scandal,” Hanage said. “If you care about working people, give them sick leave. That sick leave will enable them to avoid infecting others, it will enable them to help protect workplaces – it’s just a no-brainer.”

Another reason for the disparate outcomes in the US is the fractured healthcare system. People who lack health insurance tend to wait longer to be seen by physicians, making worse outcomes more likely. They are also more likely to have pre-existing health conditions that put them at greater risk for Covid.

“There are lots and lots of ways in which societal inequities are mirrored and magnified in our death rates,” Ranney said. “With Covid, there is now no longer any way to cover up all of these underlying problems, and the impact of those problems got magnified because many of the social supports which allowed us to muddle through were no longer present.”

The US also has higher rates of death from opioids and gun violence, and lower rates of life expectancy, than similar countries. Hospital overcrowding is also higher in the US than other countries, Ranney said. “Overcrowding correlates with poor outcomes for multiple types of diseases and injuries,” she said. “And there’s been preliminary data that people are more likely to die of Covid when there’s a higher number of Covid patients in the hospital or when ICUs [intensive care units] are overwhelmed.”

One predictor of Covid deaths by country is trust in government, according to a recent [report](#) in the Lancet: countries with lower levels of trust in government had higher rates of cases and deaths.

“If you don’t trust the government, you’re less likely to follow suggestions or mandates around lockdowns, early on, or masks. And then the lack of trust also impairs governments’ ability to do important things like masking or testing or good data acquisition,” Ranney said.

Only 25 US states share reliable data on cases by age, which makes it difficult to know how many children are sick, for instance. “And then that hurts our ability to put data-driven public health measures in place, and then people don’t follow the public health measures, because they don’t trust them. And it becomes this circular problem,” Ranney said.

National leaders in the US are unable to mandate precautions, like masks or vaccines, for the entire country, with responsibilities largely falling instead to state and local leaders.

Yet leaders have seen their ability to act during health emergencies limited even more during the pandemic, with more than half of US states introducing [new limits](#) on public health powers.

“There is a constituency within the US that is beginning to look at this and see this opportunity,” Hanage said. “A lot of that comes down to: how much illness and death will people accept?”

Those who are interested in limiting public health regulations “are looking at this and thinking, whoa, a significant fraction of the population is fine with 900,000 deaths”.

There is still time to change course and prevent future losses, Ranney said.

"I do think that there's a chance to create a better future," she said, noting that leaders can "use this moment to build up the infrastructure that is needed, so if and when there is another variant or some other acute epidemic, we have the system in place to address it".

But the US reaction to the pandemic is also compounded by an American sense of exceptionalism.

"It's a very American idea to suggest that reality is what you want it to be. You can be whoever you want to be. Reality is a real thing, though. The virus doesn't care who you are," Hanage said. "It only cares that it can infect you."

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HEADLINE	02/06 Worker absences stymie companies growth
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/staff-shortages-fed-by-omicron-curbed-growth-in-fourth-quarter-11644143402?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	<p>Employers from McDonald's Corp. to home builder PulteGroup Inc. said staffing pressures caused by hiring challenges and surging Covid-19 cases suppressed growth or cut into operations in the fourth quarter.</p> <p>While pressures may be easing in some aspects for large companies, indicating a diminishing effect from the Omicron variant going forward, labor challenges and other concerns remain.</p> <p>Staffing challenges were so acute at McDonald's in mid-December that its restaurants cut back hours by about 10%, Chief Executive Christopher Kempczinski said on a conference call with analysts last month. As of late January, 1% of McDonald's restaurants still had reduced hours, he said.</p> <p>"What we've seen throughout the pandemic is that the economic fallout from each successive wave of case counts has been smaller and smaller," said Nick Bunker, an economist at job site Indeed. "While Omicron did disrupt everyday life, it didn't seem to have much impact on the labor market in terms of hiring. It does look like we're primed for continued strong progress in 2022."</p> <p>Stronger-than-expected job growth in January also indicated that effects of the variant may be moderating as Omicron peaks in many regions. U.S. employers added 467,000 jobs in January, exceeding economists' expectations.</p> <p>Still, the rapid increase in Covid-19 cases has disrupted operations at a number of manufacturers, and some companies continue to experience staffing shortages. Nearly 8.8 million workers, or about 6% of people on U.S. payrolls, were absent from work in the first 10 days of January because they were sick or caring for someone who was sick, according to census data. The absences, from that period and earlier in the Omicron surge, ate into companies' ability to fill orders, maintain regular business hours and meet growing demand.</p> <p>At PPG Industries Inc., a Pittsburgh-based maker of paints, coatings and specialty materials, some of the company's plants have had 40% of workers out in recent weeks, Chief Executive Officer Michael H. McGarry said on an earnings call last month.</p> <p>The company had more than four times as many employees absent from the workplace because of Covid-19 in December and January, compared with October and November, Mr. McGarry said.</p> <p>"The toughest job in PPG right now is a plant manager," Mr. McGarry said. "They wake up in the morning, check their phone to see how many people call off sick, then they get to work."</p> <p>PPG's rates of absenteeism declined significantly in the second half of January, Mr. McGarry said in a statement, adding that he was optimistic the trend would continue.</p>

Corporate earnings have generally surpassed expectations in the holiday quarter. About half the constituents of the S&P 500 have now reported results, and analysts estimate that profits from index constituents rose 29% in the fourth quarter from a year earlier, according to FactSet. That is up from forecasts for 21% growth at the end of September.

In January, [FedEx Corp.](#) suspended some [airfreight services in its Express network](#), which ships goods on planes, as the virus led many crew members and operational staff to call in sick. The carrier, which had incurred \$470 million in extra expenses in the previous quarter because of labor shortages, said this past week that it had resumed all of its services that were suspended.

[Domino's Pizza Inc.](#) said it [would give customers a \\$3 credit](#) if they picked up their order—a move by the pizza chain, in part, to address a shortage of workers.

Millions of workers [have quit their jobs in recent months](#), in many cases lured by better opportunities or better pay in a labor market awash with openings. In December, job openings and worker turnover hovered near their highest levels on record, according to federal data.

PulteGroup intentionally slowed sales, due in part to labor shortages in construction and supply challenges, CEO Ryan R. Marshall said. The latest surge in Covid-19 cases made it tough for contractors to field crews, Mr. Marshall said, and more difficult to expand the size of their teams to keep up with demand. He said he didn't expect challenges to dissipate soon.

Timber giant [Weyerhaeuser Co.](#) said higher turnover has affected its operations. Less-experienced employees may require more training to develop the expertise to work in a sawmill or a similar environment, CEO Devin Stockfish said on a recent earnings call.

The company is focusing on ways to get people up to speed quicker, he said. But staffing shortages because of Covid-19 or quarantines made it harder to find employees to work extra shifts, Mr. Stockfish said. He said he doesn't expect labor challenges to immediately ease in the first half of the year.

“There's a real challenge in finding labor, and that's across the system. It's not just our industry, but our industry is certainly affected: finding truck drivers, logging contractors, finding employees to work in the mills, really across the supply chain,” Mr. Stockfish said. “I think that makes it challenging to really dramatically ramp up that production.”

Executives have struggled for months to respond to staffing challenges. Some [have raised pay](#), dangled higher [signing bonuses](#), sweetened benefits or looked inward, trying to make their companies attractive workplaces that [will draw more applicants](#).

Some corporate leaders are narrowing their focus on the limited number of roles that create the most value for a company, to ensure that the organization at least retains and attracts the most qualified people for those positions, said Scott Keller, a senior partner at McKinsey & Co., who advises CEOs.

Those workers might not be the most senior in the organization hierarchy, but could be the sales manager overseeing the company's three biggest accounts, or the person in charge of digitizing operations, Mr. Keller said.

“CEOs have started to think very crisply about what roles matter most,” Mr. Keller said. “I think they're uncovering roles that the CEO should pay attention to that are down and in the organization.”

That concern extends to supply chains. At defense contractor Raytheon Technologies Corp. , CEO Greg Hayes pointed to shortages of skilled workers at suppliers, calling the lack of welders who make metal castings the most important shortage right now.

	Raytheon is working with its suppliers to find the materials it needs, but “it’s not going to happen here in the first quarter,” Mr. Hayes said on the company’s earnings call. “We see that we’re going to have a slow Q1.”
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HEADLINE	02/06 WA increase reckless driving, fatal crashes
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3334119/washington-us-increase-fatal-car-crashes-2021/
GIST	<p>Washington — like other states — is seeing an increase in reckless driving and fatal crashes, potentially fueled, at least in part, by the pandemic.</p> <p>“Impaired driving is up, not wearing a seatbelt is up, speeding is up,” Staci Hoff with the Washington Traffic Safety Commission told KIRO Newsradio.</p> <p>At the same time, Hoff says “traffic enforcement has declined substantially since COVID basically, since the early months of 2020.” She says that’s due to a variety of reasons, from budget cuts to recruitment and retention challenges.</p> <p>But just because traffic enforcement is down, doesn’t mean reckless behavior is too.</p> <p>“We have an over 50% increase in citations being issued to drivers traveling more than 40 miles per hour over the speed limit,” Hoff said.</p> <p>“Over the last two years, when we talk about risk and safety, it’s very much been dominated by COVID,” she added, noting how traffic safety has simply dropped out of the conversation.</p> <p>This isn’t just a Washington issue either — federal safety regulators say U.S. traffic deaths surged in the first nine months of 2021 to 31,720 estimated deaths. That’s the highest nine-month figure since 2006.</p> <p>The report comes from the U.S. Department of Transportation’s National Highway Traffic Safety Association, and shows the rate of people dying in vehicle crashes in the first nine months of 2021 was up about 12% from the same period in 2020.</p> <p>Out of the 10 regions of the country that federal safety regulators looked at, the Northwest saw the biggest jump in fatal crashes, up 20%. Washington saw “just over” a 10% increase, but the increase in Oregon was 29%, and 36% in Idaho.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/06 Monroe schools offers \$34M toxic exposure
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/times-watchdog/monroe-school-district-offers-34-million-to-families-sickened-by-toxic-exposures-at-sky-valley-education-center/
GIST	<p>The Monroe School District offered an extraordinary \$34 million settlement to students and parents exposed to toxic chemicals that festered for at least eight years on a public school campus.</p> <p>Although the school district proposed the striking settlement in November under court seal, preventing the public from seeing the offer, the \$34 million figure appears in a separate court document obtained this past week by The Seattle Times.</p> <p>In publicly available court documents, the school district doesn’t accept responsibility for hazardous conditions on the Sky Valley Education Center campus, which were detailed in a recent investigation by The Seattle Times and ProPublica. Instead, the district defended its cleanup efforts on campus, saying it acted appropriately to remove toxicants and inform parents.</p> <p>Records show the school district was slow to clear out toxic material from the Monroe campus, even as pressure from parents and staff escalated and dozens reported illnesses.</p>

As early as 2014, Monroe School District officials found a mixture of harmful conditions, including poor air ventilation and the presence of polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, a banned, human-made chemical that the Environmental Protection Agency has linked to some cancers and other illnesses.

More than 200 parents, teachers and students filed a series of lawsuits against Monsanto, the chemical manufacturer of PCBs, for exposure to the toxicant at Sky Valley. Children and staff claim they became severely ill, reporting cancers, brain damage, hormonal problems and skin conditions.

Monsanto, which is now owned by Bayer, has gone to trial in two of the lawsuits, in which [juries awarded 11 people a collective \\$247 million](#). Several others are awaiting trial.

Monsanto produced the PCBs, a chemical preservative for building materials, used in light fixtures and caulking in Sky Valley's 1950s- and 1960s-era buildings. The light fixtures at Sky Valley started failing in 2014, leaking sticky, yellow PCB oil into classrooms.

The school district was slow to remove PCB-laden light fixtures from the campus, even after the EPA stepped in to guide officials and encourage a swift cleanup. At one point, school officials certified in writing — and assured parents — that all the PCB-containing material had been removed from Sky Valley, but an EPA inspection later revealed that wasn't the case, The Times reported last month.

At least 15 of the King County Superior Court lawsuits, with 195 plaintiffs, also took aim at the Monroe School District, which opted to negotiate a settlement separately from Monsanto. **The settlement excludes Sky Valley staff who sued Monsanto because Washington state law bars employees from suing employers for negligence in most cases.**

The \$34 million offer is the maximum allowed under the school district's insurance policy "in order to protect [the Monroe School District's] finances and its ability to continue operating," according to a statement the district provided to The Times last week.

The district called the settlement a "prudent action under the circumstances."

It isn't clear if the \$34 million is the highest settlement payout for a school district in the state, but the sum is about half as much as the district's insurance service, Washington State Schools Risk Management Pool, spent in total last year on claims, according to risk management records. Washington state schools enroll about 1 million students.

The Monroe School District, which serves about 6,000 children, has an annual budget of \$93 million.

The \$34 million settlement figure first appeared in a report by a special master, an outside judge tasked with deciding how the sum should be split among the 195 claimants.

The report suggests that children who were exposed to harmful hazards, some of whom are now adults, should collect the bulk of the payout. Adults who were exposed would get the next highest payouts. And family members of those exposed would collect the least.

About a third of the settlement would go toward attorneys' fees and costs. After subtracting the fees, each child exposed would collect roughly \$171,000; each adult exposed would collect about \$58,000; and each family member of someone exposed would collect about \$2,300, according to estimates in the report.

Many plaintiffs experienced "significant, profound damages which they will have to live with for the remainder of their lives and for which they deserve to be compensated," wrote the special master, King County Superior Court Judge Richard McDermott.

In offering context on the case, McDermott blasts Monsanto, writing that the chemical giant "is going to have to get serious about a global settlement that is large enough that the plaintiffs will have to pay attention."

Last week, Monsanto filed a motion to cut parts of McDermott's report or seal McDermott's report entirely and bar any parties from publicly releasing it. Monsanto, which claimed the report made comments on topics that were still being litigated in trials, wasn't involved in the Monroe School District settlement discussions.

"The anti-Monsanto statements in the report were not supported by any judicial fact-finding, not adopted by the court, and are damaging to a fair and impartial jury selection and trial process," reads a statement provided to The Seattle Times by Bayer, which in 2018 acquired Monsanto, explaining the request to change or seal the reports.

King County Superior Court Judge Douglass North, overseeing the Sky Valley cases, hasn't ruled on Monsanto's request.

The cases have apparently pitted Monsanto and the school district against one another, with both parties arguing that the other is to blame for the health crisis at Sky Valley.

McDermott wrote in his report that the Monroe School District is "far less culpable than the product manufacturer."

Monsanto, on the other hand, argued in court that the school district was repeatedly warned about PCBs but failed to take aggressive action.

To this day, the EPA is still working with the district on a cleanup, and Sky Valley, with about 700 students and teachers, remains open. In response to The Times' story, the Monroe School District said it prioritizes the health and safety of students and continues to work on remediation efforts. The latest PCB testing on campus, carried out in August by a district contractor, showed negligible levels of the toxicant on campus, according to school district records.

Experts say hazardous PCBs are likely lingering in aging campuses across the state and country, but Washington does not require testing for PCBs in schools.

And although health districts are required to inspect campuses for environmental hazards, there is no requirement to enforce recommendations or remove certain hazards — a gap in state law that afforded school and health officials a defense against allegations of negligence at Sky Valley. State law also does not require school districts to disclose testing results to parents, students or teachers.

Those gaps have lingered despite the Washington State Department of Ecology flagging PCBs in schools as a priority in 2015, calling the hazard "especially concerning." The department requested legislative dollars to survey schools and target potential hotbeds for PCB exposure, but because lawmakers delayed funding the request, Ecology only started surveying school districts last summer, starting with Eastern Washington districts.

Without a survey, there's no way to know how many campuses across the state might be exposing students and staff to toxic conditions.

In response to The Seattle Times' reporting on Sky Valley, [state lawmakers and advocates plan to push for PCB testing](#) and prioritize renovating or replacing older buildings.

Rep. Gerry Pollet, D-Seattle, who worked on state laws on lead testing in school drinking water, aims to discuss and propose a list of actions, including a mandatory timeline for remediating environmental hazards to prevent school districts from delaying cleanups.

Sen. Lisa Wellman, D-Mercer Island, chair of the Early Learning & K-12 Education Committee, aims to convene a work group to tackle environmental hazards in schools.

HEADLINE	02/06 Africatown breaks ground on housing
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/africatown-breaks-ground-on-affordable-housing-and-more-in-seattles-central-district/
GIST	<p>Africatown Community Land Trust broke ground Saturday on a new affordable housing development supporters say will not only provide much-needed homes in the city's Central District but also support Black architects, planners and construction firms.</p> <p>"We want to make sure our projects are maximizing empowerment into our community," said K. Wyking Garrett, president and CEO of Africatown Community Land Trust.</p> <p>The seven-story development at 23rd Avenue and East Spring Street known as Africatown Plaza is set to include 126 affordable rental units, a community room, retail spaces and an art collection. The housing is designed to be affordable for people making below 60% of area median income, or about \$48,600 for a single person. The project is part of a broader effort to offset years of gentrification in the historically Black neighborhood where home prices have skyrocketed, developers have transformed blocks and the Black population had shrunk to 20% by 2016.</p> <p>Mayor Bruce Harrell hailed the project Saturday. "When I walked these streets as a little kid, we were not talking about anti-displacement," Harrell said. "We thought we would live here forever."</p> <p>Africatown acquired the land through a partnership with the nonprofit Forterra and private developer Lake Union Partners and will partner with the affordable housing developer Community Roots Housing for construction. Community Roots Housing said the project will tap nearly \$96 million in funding and financing from Africatown, Community Roots, the city of Seattle, King County and other sources.</p> <p>"That's what we're here to break ground on, to break ground on a new normal rooted in equity," Garrett said. The general contractor on the project is a joint venture that includes a Black-owned construction firm. Still, "we have a long way to go" to a time when more projects are led by Black developers and construction firms on their own, he said. "We know it's a long way to go from surviving to thriving."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/07 Ottawa in state of emergency over protests
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/canada-police-act-to-rein-in-protests-against-covid-measures/
GIST	<p>TORONTO (AP) — The mayor of Canada's capital declared a state of emergency Sunday and a former U.S. ambassador to Canada said groups in the U.S. must stop interfering in the domestic affairs of America's neighbor as protesters opposed to COVID-19 restrictions continued to paralyze Ottawa's downtown.</p> <p>Mayor Jim Watson said the declaration highlights the need for support from other jurisdictions and levels of government. It gives the city some additional powers around procurement and how it delivers services, which could help purchase equipment required by frontline workers and first responders.</p> <p>Thousands of protesters descended in Ottawa again on the weekend, joining a hundred who remained since last weekend. Residents of Ottawa are furious at the nonstop blaring of horns, traffic disruption and harassment and fear no end is in sight after the police chief called it a "siege" that he could not manage.</p> <p>The "freedom truck convoy" has attracted support from many U.S. Republicans including former President Donald Trump, who called Prime Minister Justin Trudeau a "far left lunatic" who has "destroyed Canada with insane Covid mandates."</p> <p>"Canada US relations used to be mainly about solving technical issues. Today Canada is unfortunately experiencing radical US politicians involving themselves in Canadian domestic issues. Trump and his followers are a threat not just to the US but to all democracies," Bruce Heyman, a former U.S. ambassador under President Barack Obama, tweeted.</p>

Heyman said “under no circumstances should any group in the USA fund disruptive activities in Canada. Period. Full stop.”

After crowdfunding site GoFundMe said it would refund or redirect to charities the vast majority of the millions raised by demonstrators protesting in the Canadian capital, prominent U.S. Republicans like Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis complained.

But GoFundMe had already changed its mind and said it would be issuing refunds to all. The site said it cut off funding for the organizers because it had determined the effort violated the site’s terms of service due to unlawful activity.

Ontario Premier Doug Ford has called it an occupation.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton tweeted: “Patriotic Texans donated to Canadian truckers’ worthy cause.” and Texas Sen. Ted Cruz said on Fox News “government doesn’t have the right to force you to comply to their arbitrary mandates.”

“For some senior American politicians, patriotism means renting a mob to put a G-7 capital under siege,” tweeted Gerald Butts, a former senior adviser to Trudeau.

In Canada’s largest city, Toronto, police controlled and later ended a much smaller protest by setting up road blocks and preventing any trucks or cars from getting near the provincial legislature. Police also moved in to clear a key intersection in the city.

Many Canadians have been outraged over the crude behavior of the demonstrators. Some protesters set fireworks off on the grounds of the National War Memorial late Friday. A number have carried signs and flags with swastikas last weekend and compared vaccine mandates to fascism.

Protesters have said they won’t leave until all mandates and COVID-19 restrictions are gone. They are also calling for the removal of Trudeau’s government, though it is responsible for few of the measures, most of which were put in place by provincial governments.

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HEADLINE	02/06 France president shuttle diplomacy
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/06/world/europe/ukraine-russia-macron.html
GIST	<p>PARIS — The standoff with Russia over Ukraine enters a critical phase this week. The United States has snapped NATO to attention and moved forces east. Moscow has readied still more forces on the Ukraine border. But beneath those tensions, diplomatic avenues are being feverishly explored and the outlines of potential solutions, still amorphous, may be taking form.</p> <p>President Biden meets Monday with Chancellor Olaf Scholz, and President Emmanuel Macron of France, at the same time, will visit his Russian counterpart, Vladimir V. Putin, in Moscow before traveling to Kyiv.</p> <p>With the Biden administration staking out a hard line, Germany lying low and Mr. Putin seemingly determined to force a solution to Russia’s security grievances, it is Mr. Macron who has positioned himself at the center of the diplomacy in Europe. To Moscow, he is a “quality interlocutor,” as Mr. Putin called Mr. Macron, according to a senior official in the French presidency, speaking on the condition of anonymity in keeping with French government practice.</p> <p>For Mr. Macron the chance to lead the effort to create a new European security architecture has placed him front and center on perhaps the biggest stage of his presidency, just two months before elections. It has given him an opportunity to step into a larger leadership role for all of Europe and to put some flesh on his sometimes grandiose visions for a Europe allied with, but more independent of, the United States.</p>

“Do we want a Russia that is totally aligned with China or one that is somewhere between China and Europe?” Bruno Le Maire, the French economy minister, who is very close to Mr. Macron, said on Friday as Russia and China declared “no limits” to their friendship and called on NATO to “abandon its ideologized Cold War approaches.”

For France, the choreographed embrace of Mr. Putin and President Xi Jinping of China on the eve of the Beijing Winter Olympics was a demonstration of the ominous wider ramifications of the Ukraine crisis, as Mr. Macron embarks on several days of intense diplomacy.

The risks are as great as the potential payoffs for Mr. Macron. Solutions to the crisis seem fiendishly elusive for now, even if Mr. Putin has appeared less directly threatening toward Ukraine over the past week.

The French president has a double purpose: to stop the war that a massive Russian troop concentration at the Ukrainian border threatens; and to allay the festering Russian grievances that NATO’s expansion eastward in 1999 and 2004 provoked, with the eventual aim of integrating Russia in a new European security system that offsets its lurch toward China.

It’s a tall order, but Mr. Macron has never lacked for audacity. He will need to tread carefully. “There’s frustration in European countries, including Germany, with Mr. Macron’s tendency to forge ahead and then yell at them for not doing anything,” said Jeremy Shapiro, a former State Department official who is now the research director of the European Council on Foreign Relations. “That weakens him.”

French officials described in broad outline the twin approaches Mr. Macron would adopt in his meetings with Mr. Putin and President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine.

The first is to use the Normandy Format — a grouping of France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia — to bolster the 2015 Minsk 2 agreement, a deeply ambiguous document that secured a cease-fire in eastern Ukraine but that has proved largely inoperable, not least because nobody agrees on its meaning.

Could some interpretation of the accord, involving the eventual powers of the breakaway Donbas region over national policy, go some way toward satisfying Mr. Putin’s insistence that Ukraine never join NATO, a demand the United States and its allies, including France, are adamant in rejecting?

The second, in close consultation with Mr. Biden, is to secure a concrete signal of de-escalation that reverses the Russian military buildup and, as a means to achieving that, explores what Mr. Putin’s ultimate “red line” is in the confrontation.

The senior official at the French presidency said the nucleus of the Western conflict with Mr. Putin lay “in the extension of NATO and the inclusion in it of countries from the former Soviet space,” which created “an area of volatility that has to be reduced.” He added that Mr. Putin had told Mr. Macron that he wanted “a conversation of substance” that goes “to the heart of the matter.”

In effect, France appears to be saying that Mr. Putin’s demands, which include pushing NATO back out of formerly Soviet-controlled countries, cannot ever be satisfied but that getting “to the heart of the matter” involves acknowledgment that NATO expansion created permanent grievances with Russia even as it secured freedom for 100 million central Europeans.

No one believes that Romania, Lithuania and other states that joined an expanded NATO are ever going to leave it, or that NATO is ever going to abrogate its 2008 Bucharest statement that Ukraine “will become” a member of the alliance. But, as Turkey’s almost 60-year flirtation with the European Union illustrates, there are ways of turning a candidacy for membership of an organization into an indefinite holding pattern.

“We can take a step toward Putin, recognize he is not completely wrong,” said Justin Vaïsse, the former head of policy planning at the French foreign ministry who now heads the Paris Peace Forum.

The senior official at the French presidency said, “Ukraine is not a member of NATO and, to my knowledge, will not be for a while.”

Mr. Macron wants to explore whether American offers last month could be complemented by further confidence-building measures that permit a way out of the crisis.

The American proposal involved more transparency about missile deployment in Eastern Europe and a call for reciprocal commitments by both the United States and Russia to refrain from deploying missiles or troops in Ukraine. Mr. Putin has rejected the American response to his demands as inadequate.

“Conceivably the arms control offers of the other day could be combined with some sort of consultative mechanism for changes in NATO status, or some sort of moratorium on NATO expansion, or some creative interpretation of the Minsk agreement that gives a Donbas constituent assembly veto powers over what the government will do,” Mr. Shapiro, the former State Department official, suggested.

None of this appears likely, however, given Mr. Putin’s unprovoked direct threat to Ukraine, his annexation of Crimea, his invasion of Georgia in the short war of 2008 and his history of tearing up treaties when it suits him. The Biden administration, with muscular proactive diplomacy, has signaled it is in no mood for compromise.

Mr. Putin, it often seems, is only the latest exponent of what Joseph Conrad called Russian officialdom’s “almost sublime disdain for the truth.”

Despite this, Mr. Macron, who knows that a Russian invasion of Ukraine would send gas costs spiraling higher at a time when the French electorate is angry about lost purchasing power, sees some potential in the Normandy Format. A first meeting last month ended with limited progress, a second meeting is scheduled soon, and a summit of French, German, Russian and Ukrainian leaders has been suggested.

The Minsk 2 agreement calls for a “decentralization” of Ukraine that confers “special status” on areas of the east now controlled by separatists, with the “specificities” to be agreed on “with representatives of these areas.”

Russia, in a creative interpretation of these “specificities,” has argued that they should include granting the elected representatives in these areas a veto on Ukrainian foreign policy decisions, including membership in NATO. In this way, Ukraine would effectively become part of Russia’s sphere of influence.

“This is not going to happen,” Dmytro Kuleba, the Ukrainian foreign minister, said last week. “Never.”

Mr. Zelensky, the president, has sounded more ambivalent. “If it is not NATO, then point to some other security guarantees,” he said last month. It was unclear what he had in mind.

The “security guarantees” offered by the Budapest Memorandum of 1994, in which Russia vowed to respect Ukraine’s existing borders and sovereignty, proved worthless.

Absent other avenues, the Normandy Format at least brings the parties together. Mr. Shapiro argued that it could help forge stability.

“Instability is the Russian strength. Stability is our strength,” he said. “NATO and the European Union expansion were a very powerful way to secure democracy in Eastern European countries. But we got out of it what we could. If you believe in the superiority of the Western economic and political model, as I do, stability makes that evident, and spheres of influence are a pretty good way to establish that.”

Mr. Putin, the French official said, “wants long-term visibility” on Ukraine and Europe. That appears to leave Mr. Macron playing a potentially dangerous game, trying to balance the “new European security order” he has said he seeks with his commitment to the United States and the NATO alliance.

HEADLINE	02/07 Poised for massive quake; region ready?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/07/us/tsunami-northwest-evacuation-towers.html
GIST	<p>OCEAN SHORES, Wash. — The 350 children at Ocean Shores Elementary School have practiced their earthquake survival plans, dropping under desks to ride out the convulsions, then racing upstairs to the second floor to await the coming tsunami.</p> <p>Unless something changes, their preparations will most likely be futile.</p> <p>The Cascadia fault off the Pacific Northwest coast is poised for a massive, 9.0-magnitude earthquake at some point, scientists say, a rupture that would propel a wall of water across much of the Northwest coast within minutes. Low-lying coastal neighborhoods in Washington, Oregon and Northern California would be under 10 feet or more of water, with the elementary school in Ocean Shores, Wash., facing an inundation that could be 23 feet deep.</p> <p>The second-floor refuge students rush to in their drills stands 13 feet off the ground — in a structure that was not built to withstand a raging tsunami in the first place.</p> <p>“The fact of the matter is that if a tsunami occurs tomorrow, we are going to lose all of our children,” said Andrew Kelly, the superintendent of the North Beach School District, which includes Ocean Shores. Mr. Kelly is one of a growing number of local officials who are calling for a network of elevated buildings and platforms along the Northwest coast that could provide an escape for thousands of people who might otherwise be doomed in the event of a tsunami.</p> <p>On Tuesday, voters in Ocean Shores and neighboring communities will decide whether to approve a bond measure that would, in part, build new vertical additions at two schools, offering students and nearby residents a place to flee from a surging ocean.</p> <p>Scientists have been warning for years that another catastrophic quake could erupt at any time in the Cascadia subduction zone, a 600-mile-long “megathrust” fault that stretches from Vancouver Island, British Columbia, to Cape Mendocino, Calif.</p> <p>A quake from the fault, located roughly 70 miles offshore, could cause land along the shore to immediately drop by several feet. The sudden movement under the sea would send massive waves toward shore. And while recent tsunamis caused by earthquakes and volcanoes in the Pacific Rim have resulted in small surges on the West Coast of the United States hours later, a Cascadia wave would arrive at shorelines within 15 minutes.</p> <p>Along many stretches of the Northwest coast, there are no bluffs or high buildings to climb — nowhere to go.</p> <p>The lack of evacuation options means that the death toll could be almost unfathomable, far surpassing any other natural disaster in U.S. history. In Washington State, according to a 9.0 scenario the state uses for its estimates, about 70,000 people would likely be within the lowlands that could be engulfed by a large tsunami, and 32,000 of them would have no nearby high ground to escape to within 15 minutes.</p> <p>Depending on the season and the time of day, Oregon estimates that 5,000 to 20,000 could die along the coast in a similar event, largely because of a lack of escape options; the state has planned for an even deadlier quake, based on the geological record, that could create a tsunami 100 feet high in some places. Additional deaths are expected in Northern California, notably in Crescent City, where a tsunami that came all the way from Alaska killed 11 people in 1962.</p> <p>The question, scientists say, is not if but when. The chance of a 9.0 megaquake on the Cascadia fault in the next 50 years, according to the research, is about one in nine (although the chance of the precise kind of quake envisioned in the planning models used by each state would be less); the odds of a smaller but still</p>

powerful earthquake — of a magnitude greater than 7.0 — are one in three. Pressure is continuing to build along the hundreds of miles where the Juan de Fuca plate is pushing under the North American plate.

“Every day, on average, they are being pushed together at about the rate fingernails grow,” said Corina Allen, the chief hazards geologist in Washington State. “Every year that the earthquake doesn’t happen, there’s a higher chance that it will the next year.”

Officials over the years have posted signs for evacuation routes and plotted ways to move people to higher ground. But many communities remain painfully vulnerable.

In the Long Beach area of Washington, for example, several communities — home to thousands — lie along a flat, narrow peninsula that stretches more than 20 miles. Officials in recent years had considered building an artificial hill to help with tsunami evacuation but abandoned the idea when modeling showed it needed to be much higher than was feasible.

Perhaps nowhere is more vulnerable than Ocean Shores, an idyllic community of 6,700 residents, with thousands more who visit in the summer to escape urban life and enjoy the miles of pristine beach next to thundering waves. The town has little elevation, and the tsunami that could accompany a 9.0 rupture would wash over all of it.

People could try driving out, but officials expect roads to be buckled and sunken, or covered in power lines, trees and debris. The expected subduction would cause the entire area to abruptly sink up to seven feet; the shaking could cause liquefaction of sandy soils before the tsunami reached shore.

People could try running to high ground outside of town, but Ocean Shores sits on a six-mile-long peninsula. Those who live toward the southern end would be about eight miles away from high ground. Depending on their location, residents might have only 10 minutes after the shaking stopped before the wave started washing over them.

“In 10 minutes, there’s not that much time to go very far,” Ms. Allen said.

The best option may be to get on a rooftop or to climb a tree. But many of the region’s buildings were not constructed to withstand such a quake, let alone a tsunami, which would be hurtling cars and logs and other debris at objects in its path.

Dozens of other waterfront communities are also at risk, researchers said, including Seaside, Gearhart and Tillamook, in Oregon; Crescent City and the Samoa Peninsula, near Eureka, in California; and areas up and down the Washington coast.

To improve the chances of survival, officials in Washington State have proposed a network of 58 vertical evacuation structures along the outer coast and advised considering dozens of others. They could provide 22,000 people with an option for escape, although thousands of others would remain out of range. Each structure could cost about \$3 million.

Vertical evacuation structures have been embraced in Japan for years, in the form of platforms, towers and artificial berms. They became a refuge for many in [the 2011 earthquake and tsunami](#), although that event still killed more than 19,000 people.

In the Pacific Northwest, only two vertical evacuation structures have been built so far. One is an Oregon State University building in Newport, Ore. The other is a portion of Ocosta Elementary School in Washington. Other cities have considered but not yet built evacuation towers, including Seaside, Ore., which relocated its middle school and high school to hills east of town.

In Tokeland, Wash., Charlene Nelson, the chairwoman of the Shoalwater Bay Tribe, said the tribe has been working for about 18 years on escape strategies. Their first recourse was a building up in the hills designed as an evacuation center, with supplies.

They ran practice events to get people to high ground, but one of the many families living on the narrow strip of land jutting into Willapa Bay found it took them 56 minutes by foot to get up to the center. The wave would most likely arrive in 20 minutes.

The tribe recently broke ground on a tower, largely funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, with pilings buried 51 feet in the ground and two elevated platforms that could hold hundreds of people.

Even when the structure is completed, Ms. Nelson said, people will need to practice their escape plans and know the routes to possible safety. They need a bag ready to go with key supplies — but not so many that it will slow them down when running for their lives. There won't be time for hesitation or for figuring out which direction to head.

"You need to be prepared, and you need to know what to do, and you need to do it," she said.

Aside from whatever damage a tsunami might bring, the earthquake itself would bring widespread devastation, with crumbling buildings, failing bridges, energy disruptions and mass casualties across a 140,000-square-mile area, including Seattle and Portland.

The urgency has been building over the past few years, which in coastal towns have felt like a ticking clock.

The last large quake on the Cascadia fault occurred on Jan. 26, 1700, scientists say. Chris Goldfinger, a researcher at Oregon State University, said geologic evidence from the past 10,000 years indicates that massive quakes with a magnitude of around 9.0 happen on the fault on an average of every 430 years. When including smaller but still powerful quakes on portions of the fault, the timeline in some areas shrinks to every 250 years.

It has been 322 years.

Bringing the expected casualty numbers down is difficult when the response planning has largely been left up to each community, Mr. Goldfinger said. A comprehensive federal solution with accompanying funding is needed, he said, and there is little time for delay given the amount of work needed to prepare.

"It's going to dwarf the scale of any disaster we have ever had," Mr. Goldfinger said. "We know it's coming."

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HEADLINE	02/07 Australia opens Feb 21 vaccinated travelers
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/australia-open-borders-vaccinated-travelers-feb-21-82715327
GIST	<p>CANBERRA, Australia -- Australia will open its borders to all vaccinated tourists and business travelers from Feb. 21 in a further relaxation of pandemic restrictions announced Monday.</p> <p>Australia imposed some of the world's toughest travel restrictions on its citizens and permanent residents in March 2020 to prevent them from bringing COVID-19 home.</p> <p>When the border restrictions were relaxed in November in response to an increasing vaccination rate among the Australian population, international students and skilled migrants were prioritized over tourists in being welcomed back to Australia.</p> <p>Prime Minister Scott Morrison said his senior ministers agreed on Monday that the border would reopen to all vaccinated visas holders from Feb. 21.</p>

Morrison said visitors must have proof of vaccination. He referred to Serbian tennis star Novak Djokovic being deported by the Australian government last month because he was not vaccinated against coronavirus.

“Events earlier in the year should have sent a very clear message, I think, to everyone around the world that that is the requirement to enter into Australia,” Morrison said.

The Djokovic case demonstrated that visitors gaining visas through an automated process before setting off for Australia does not guarantee that they will meet entry requirements on arrival.

Home Affairs Minister Karen Andrews said visitors who could provide proof of a medical reason why they could not be vaccinated could apply for a travel exemption.

Visitors to Australia could also have to contend with various states’ COVID-19 rules if they move around the country.

The strictest state border rules are enforced by Western Australia which covers a third of the island continent.

The state allows only 265 international arrivals a week and requires a 14-day quarantine period.

Australia delayed its staged border reopening after two Australians who returned from southern Africa on Nov. 27 became the first to test positive for the omicron variant.

The arrivals of students and skilled workers were postponed by two weeks until Dec. 15.

Tourist operators have been lobbying the government to bring tourists back sooner. The southern hemisphere summer is in its final month.

The Australian Tourism Export Council, the peak industry body representing the nation’s tourism export sector, said tourism operations were looking forward to rebuilding their markets.

“Australian tourism businesses will rejoice in the news that our borders will reopen to all international travelers,” the council’s managing director Peter Shelley said.

“It’s been a long, hard and desperate road for every tourism business across the country and we have lost many along the way, but this news will give those who have survived a clear target to work towards and a start point for the rebuilding of the industry,” Shelley added.

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HEADLINE	02/06 US troops arrive in Poland amid tensions
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/us-airborne-infantry-troops-poland-amid-ukraine-tension-82705609
GIST	<p>RZESZOW-JASIONKA, Poland -- A few dozen elite U.S troops and equipment were seen landing Sunday in southeastern Poland near the border with Ukraine, following President Joe Biden's orders to deploy 1,700 soldiers there amid fears of a Russian invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Hundreds more infantry troops of the 82nd Airborne Division are still expected to arrive at the Rzeszow-Jasionka airport, 90 kilometers (56 miles) from Poland’s border with Ukraine. A U.S. Air Force Boeing C-17 Globemaster plane brought a few dozen troops and vehicles.</p> <p>Their commander is Maj. Gen. Christopher Donahue, who on Aug. 30 was the last American soldier to leave Afghanistan.</p>

“Our national contribution here in Poland shows our solidarity with all of our allies here in Europe and, obviously, during this period of uncertainty, we know that we are stronger together,” Donahue said at the airport.

In Warsaw, Polish Defense Minister Mariusz Blaszczak hailed the deployment, saying that “deterrence and solidarity are the best response to Moscow's aggressive policy, to the aggressive attempt at reconstructing the Russian empire.”

Russia has amassed some 100,000 troops on the borders of Ukraine, some for joint military exercises in Belarus, but insists it has no intentions of invading Ukraine.

A collective response by NATO members is “the best response to a threat, the only method of assuring security to Poland and to other NATO countries on the alliance's eastern flank,” Blaszczak said.

He stressed he has held a number of talks on the subject with U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin.

Biden ordered additional U.S. troops deployed to Poland, Romania and Germany to demonstrate to both allies and foes America’s commitment to NATO’s eastern flank amid rising tensions between Russia and Ukraine. NATO's eastern member Poland borders both Russia and Ukraine. Romania borders Ukraine.

The division can rapidly deploy within 18 hours and conduct parachute assaults to secure key objectives. Based in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, the division's history goes back to 1917.

Earlier in the week, U.S. planes brought equipment and logistics troops in preparation for the arrival of part of the division to the airport.

Polish soldiers have previously worked together with the U.S. division on missions in Iraq and Afghanistan and have trained together, according to Maj. Przemyslaw Lipczynski, a spokesman for the Polish Army's 18th Mechanized Division.

Some 4,000 U.S. troops have been stationed in Poland since 2017 on a rotating basis, as a security boost in the face of Russia's increased military activity.

European officials fear that the continent's energy supplies are vulnerable i n the case of hostilities over Ukraine.

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HEADLINE	02/05 Gas prices record high Southern Calif.
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/gas-price-orange-county-los-angeles-county-record-high/
GIST	<p>Gas prices in Orange County have reached a record high. The average price of self-serve regular is \$4.70 a gallon, beating the previous record set in 2012, CBS Los Angeles reports.</p> <p>That has given way to a shocking sight: \$4.99 a gallon for regular gas at a Chevron station in Costa Mesa — the most expensive price for regular gas in Orange County.</p> <p>John Doidge says he was only there because he only needed a couple of gallons, and it was the closest station to home.</p> <p>"It's all about convenience. I just needed a couple of gallons for the lawnmower, get it here real quick," he said.</p> <p>For that convenience, he paid \$25 for just five gallons.</p> <p>The weather is still cool and blustery, but gas prices are already approaching summer highs. In Los Angeles County, the average price of self-serve regular is at \$4.72 — tying a record price set in November</p>

— while Ventura County prices are right up there with Orange County. In the Inland Empire, gas prices are up to \$4.65.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, gas prices increased almost 50% from December 2020 to December 2021.

"Today, really expensive," Ariana Garcia said. "I think with like having four kids, we're always driving to practices, and to school... It's just a lot of money that's going to gas."

Experts say there are a number of factors pushing gas prices up so early in the year.

"We see record oil prices that are contributing to this high price, and also, the local refineries started shipping their summer-blend of gasoline this week, and that always traditionally pushes up prices," Marie Montgomery of the Auto Club said.

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HEADLINE	02/06 Warning: long Covid 'mass disability event'
SOURCE	https://www.news.com.au/technology/science/human-body/mass-disability-event-warning-as-huge-numbers-diagnosed-with-long-covid/news-story/d541286fc71ac1b2a262ac798238d4ec
GIST	<p>A Pulitzer Prize winner has warned a "mass disability event" is already under way, as numbers of those suffering long-term symptoms after having Covid continue to grow.</p> <p>And the growing crisis could put more pressure on an already struggling Australian health system, as well as see thousands of people forced to leave their jobs for health reasons.</p> <p>Ed Yong, a science writer at <i>The Atlantic</i>, has been chronicling symptoms of sufferers post-Covid since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, when the term "long Covid" was yet to be coined.</p> <p>At the time, tens of thousands of people across the world, known as "long-haulers", began reporting debilitating symptoms even after they recovered from their initial illness.</p> <p>"I first wrote about them in early June," Yong wrote in August 2020.</p> <p>"Since then, I've received hundreds of messages from people who have been suffering for months – alone, unheard and pummeled by unrelenting and unpredictable symptoms."</p> <p>The Washington-based journalist's collection of work on long Covid in 2020 earned him the 2021 Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting.</p> <p>'Mass disability event'</p> <p>Two years since Yong began reporting on long Covid, he told news.com.au he is still receiving emails "from people who've been dealing with symptoms since near the start of the pandemic, and others who've started down that path more recently".</p> <p>He's warned that the huge number of infections seen by Omicron and its predecessors will see millions of people around the world affected by a "mass disability event".</p> <p>"Even if you take the most conservative estimates for the proportion of people with Covid who develop long-term symptoms, that still translates to tens of millions of people worldwide," he said.</p> <p>"Some of those people will recover, but others will be disabled for the foreseeable future.</p> <p>"The scale of such a mass disability event is truly hard to imagine, and it is appalling that we are forced to imagine it because two years on, long Covid still isn't being counted, and many long-haulers are still being ignored."</p>

Yong likened long Covid to other “marginalised” diseases.

“The piece I want to highlight, and that I think a lot of people still miss, is that long Covid has important similarities to ME/CFS, dysautonomia and other chronic, complex, marginalised conditions.

“There aren’t many scientists who study these conditions but they do exist, and their work means that we’re not starting from scratch when it comes to understanding long Covid.

“Even many scientists are unaware of this, and are thus reinventing the wheel.”

More than 200 symptoms

Long Covid has more than 200 different symptoms across 10 organ systems associated with it, according to [research](#) conducted in Canada late last year.

The most common include ongoing debilitating fatigue, brain fog, shortness of breath, pain, sleep disturbances, anxiety and depression.

Other symptoms include muscle weakness and joint pain, stomach and intestinal symptoms such as diarrhoea, psychological effects like mood swings, and sensory symptoms such as changes to smell or taste.

Individuals with the post Covid-19 condition may also have impaired cognitive and physical functional status, including limitations in the ability to perform daily activities such as dressing or bathing, reduced ability to care for family members or dependants, difficulty returning to work and increased health care use.

Insane numbers in Australia

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has reported that about one in four cases experience symptoms of long Covid for at least a month, and one in 10 experience symptoms lasting beyond 12 weeks.

In Australia, a [study by](#) associate professor of health systems financing and organisation at Deakin University Martin Hensher examined the 2021 Delta outbreaks in Victoria and NSW where nearly 140,000 people had already been infected.

“It is clear that a number of people developed long Covid [in Australia] following the first wave,” he told news.com.au.

“People start to feel better and then often overdo it and relapse.”

Before Omicron, he predicted the combined outbreaks had led to up to 20,000 Australians having developed long Covid.

Along with a piece for [The Conversation](#), Associate Professor Hensher calculated that limited relaxation of public health measures “could generate 10,000 to 34,000 long Covid cases” while a complete relaxation of public health measures “could lead to 60,000 to 133,000 long Covid cases”.

Of that number, 2000 to 11,000 people might still be sick a year after their initial infection.

But those are underestimates in the current climate.

Associate Professor Hensher warned that with the current outbreak in Australia, it was “foolish” to think there wouldn’t be cases of long Covid.

“[It’s] possible that Omicron might behave similarly to earlier variants in terms of long Covid, because remember, with Delta and the original strain, from what we understand with long Covid, is that it’s entirely possible for people with quite mild infections to go on to develop long Covid.

“I think it would be foolish to assume that we won’t get significant long Covid cases coming out of this,” he said.

“There’s just so many people getting sick that that kind of arithmetic is going to crunch through.”

Australia not ready

Associate Professor Hensher warned Australia is already struggling under the pressure of the recent Omicron outbreak and faces further disruption due to long Covid.

“We are talking about hundreds of thousands of people [potentially affected], but they’ll be presenting themselves to the health system which is already trying to tread water and not go under from the impact of the Covid wave itself,” he told news.com.au.

“The problem with long Covid is these are people who would otherwise not have been ill, so there is a whole new set of demand for health care for people who really wouldn’t have been needing health care at a point when the system is under incredible strain or trying to recover from this incredibly stressful period we’re going through at the moment.

“It’s going to be really difficult and I think we’ll probably start to see stories of frustration of people who are not getting real support and left to fend for themselves, but the problem is we’ll now see them in potentially quite big numbers.

“I think you will see more people forced to withdraw from the labour market for health reasons.

“You’ll see people who can’t go back to work.

“Post Omicron, if we start to see larger numbers of people with long Covid, you will see people forced to drop out of the labour market.

“It will be yet another pressure on wages and the labour force and it will also add pressure on government spending because you will have people who will need welfare or disability benefits.”

What does the Government say?

The Department of Health told news.com.au: “Synthesising and interpreting data on long Covid will require ongoing collaboration between academia and governments to inform decision-making at all levels.

“The Australian Government is actively monitoring the emerging research on long Covid.”

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HEADLINE	02/06 Finland: China not respecting players rights
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/ice-hockey-china-ignoring-finnish-players-human-rights-says-coach-2022-02-06/
GIST	<p>BEIJING, Feb 6 (Reuters) - The coach of the Finland men's ice hockey team accused China of not respecting a player's human rights on Sunday as complaints about COVID-19 isolation protocols piled up at the Winter Games.</p> <p>Finnish head coach Jukka Jalonen said Marko Anttila, a ninth round pick of the Chicago Blackhawks in the 2004 NHL draft, was "not getting good food" and was under tremendous mental stress.</p> <p>"We know that he's fully healthy and ready to go and that's why we think that China, for some reason, they won't respect his human rights and that's not a great situation," head coach Jalonen said on a Zoom call with media.</p>

Anttila was no longer infectious but continued to be kept in COVID-19 isolation after testing positive 18 days ago, according to the team doctor.

More than 350 Games participants, including dozens of athletes, have tested positive on arrival in the Chinese capital since Jan. 23. They can only leave special quarantine hotels once they are free of symptoms and test negative in two PCR tests 24 hours apart.

Several Games participants have complained about the isolation conditions, as well as the confusing procedures around being allowed to leave. Organisers said on Sunday that they were [trying to](#) address complaints.

"We are in a process of addressing these problems," said Zhao Weidong, Beijing Games spokesperson, adding that they would now allow an athlete to order in food from the village.

The International Ice Hockey Federation will meet with the International Olympic Committee on Sunday to discuss Anttila and other athlete cases, Jalonen said. Finland open group play on Thursday when they face off against Slovakia.

"Hopefully, something positive we will find out," the coach said.

MORE POSITIVES

A pair of Australian curlers [earned a reprieve](#) later on Sunday after being told earlier that one of them had returned a series of positive tests and would be placed in isolation.

Tahli Gill and Dean Hewitt were able to compete in the curling mixed doubles tournament after they were cleared by a medical expert panel, the Australia team said.

On Saturday, Germany's team chief Dirk Schimmelpfennig [called conditions](#) for triple Olympic gold medalist Eric Frenzel and two other German athletes "unacceptable".

He demanded a complete overhaul including bigger and cleaner rooms, a working internet connection, sports equipment and better food.

Schimmelpfennig said on Sunday that organisers had acted after being contacted by the team, the ski federation and the International Olympic Committee.

"We have succeeded since yesterday in achieving a marked improvement in conditions for the athletes," he told reporters.

"Now the athletes have a satisfying framework of conditions. They have bigger rooms now, working wifi, an exercise bike in the room so we have appropriate and satisfying conditions in a very difficult situation for the athletes," he said.

HORROR STORY

Polish short track speed skater Natalia Maliszewska posted on Twitter that her Beijing Olympics had turned into a 'horror' story after she tested positive on Jan 30. She claimed she had received several positive and negative tests

Finally, on the day of the start (on Saturday) at 3:00 am, people pull me out of solitary ... That night was a horror.

"I slept with my clothes on because I was afraid that someone would take me to solitary in a moment again. I only looked a little through the curtains. With one eye, because I was afraid someone would see me."

	<p>Hours later, Maliszewska said she packed for the ice rink to take part in the 500 metres heats.</p> <p>"And suddenly the news that they have made a mistake! That they shouldn't let me out of solitary confinement! That I am a threat after all! That I can't compete. I have to get back to the village asap."</p> <p>Maliszewska's status at the Games was not immediately clear. A Polish Olympic Committee representative said he would clarify the situation later on Sunday.</p> <p>Swedish journalist Philip Gadd, who was whisked off to isolation in an ambulance when he arrived in Beijing on Wednesday, described his confusion and fear in a diary he is writing for his newspaper.</p> <p>"It was a really terrifying experience and it just felt like ... it didn't feel real. It felt like as if I was in a movie, a sci-fi movie or something," he told Reuters in a Zoom interview from his quarantine hotel.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/06 Pakistan: militant attacks kill 9 troops
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/pakistan-areas-cleared-militant-attacks-kill-troops-82704307
GIST	<p>QUETTA, Pakistan -- Pakistan's military said security forces cleared two areas in a southwestern province of separatist militants after they attacked two army camps, leaving nine soldiers dead and six others wounded. Twenty militants were killed in intense, hours-long firefights and follow-up operations, it said.</p> <p>The military statement issued late Saturday said militants attacked security forces camps in Baluchistan province in the districts of Naushki and Panjgur late Wednesday and both attacks were eventually repulsed.</p> <p>A recently formed separatist group, the Baluchistan Nationalist Army, claimed responsibility for the attacks in a Twitter post.</p> <p>The military said nine attackers were killed in Naushki, while four troops, including an officer, were killed. It said in Panjgur, security forces repulsed the attack after an intense exchange of fire and the attackers fled the area.</p> <p>Security forces began an operation to hunt down the fleeing attackers and a curfew in the areas was imposed.</p> <p>Four fleeing militants were killed in Panjgur, while four who were hiding elsewhere were killed in a Saturday operation when they refused to surrender, the military said. It said three other militants linked to the attacks were killed in the district of Kech on Friday. Five soldiers were killed and six others wounded in follow-up operations.</p> <p>A spokesman for the Baluch Liberation Army, a separatist group that operates under the umbrella of the Baluchistan Nationalist Army, said its Panjgur and Naushki offensive came to an end after more than 70 hours.</p> <p>"After the martyrdom of all sixteen suicide-attackers of the Majeed Brigade of the Baluch Liberation Army, 'Operation Gunjal' reached its conclusion," said Jaend Baluch, the purported spokesman, in a message to reporters on WhatsApp.</p> <p>Baluch said nine of the men attacked the Frontier Corps camp in Naushki and six stormed into the Panjgur camp.</p> <p>Authorities say they have quelled an insurgency launched by Baluch separatists demanding independence from Pakistan in the southwestern province that borders Iran and Afghanistan. However, attacks on security forces and their installations have persisted. Separatists and militants have regularly staged attacks in Baluchistan in recent years. Last week, 10 soldiers were killed in an attack on a security post in the province.</p>

The militant Pakistani Taliban group — Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, or TTP — also has a presence in Baluchistan. It is an umbrella group that is separate from the Afghan Taliban.

In a separate statement Sunday, the military said security forces killed a would-be suicide bomber from the Pakistani Taliban in the district of Tank in northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The killing was part of a continuing operation to eliminate militant accomplices in the area.

Separately, security forces arrested a militant during a raid at a hideout in in the Sarwakai area of the South Waziristan tribal district. The military statement said militant Allah Noor was trying to escape wearing woman's burqa to hide his identify.

In the Makeen area of South Waziristan, troops seized arms, ammunition and communications gear and arrested four people who were transporting them.

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HEADLINE	02/06 West Africa grapples in wave military coups
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/west-africa-grapples-wave-military-coups-82705210
GIST	<p>OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso -- It's a pattern becoming all too common again in West Africa: Mutinous soldiers detain a president, then seize control of the state broadcaster to announce they've taken over the country. International condemnation quickly follows, but the junta remains in power.</p> <p>West Africa's new wave of coups kicked off in Mali in 2020, followed by another in Guinea the following year, and then Burkina Faso late last month. Just a week later, gunmen also tried to overthrow the president of Guinea-Bissau in a machine-gun attack that lasted hours but failed.</p> <p>Military power grabs are nothing new in the region: There have been nearly 100 in West Africa since 1946 but they'd dropped off over the past decade. Now the regional body known as ECOWAS is grappling with how to bring about a return to democracy in three of its 15 member states, where juntas have seized power in the last 18 months.</p> <p>“It looks increasingly hard to argue against the idea of coup contagion – that coups in one place inspire them in another – following the chain of events in the past year,” said Eric Humphery-Smith, Africa Analyst at Verisk Maplecroft.</p> <p>The new spike in power grabs comes as the Sahel, the vast region south of the Sahara Desert, faces growing violence from Islamic extremists, which in turn has caused people to turn against elected governments in both Mali and Burkina Faso. Neighboring Niger, hard-hit by Islamic insurgents, has also been vulnerable: Security forces stopped a coup attempt there last year.</p> <p>“Coups in West Africa have been making a comeback for various reasons which bleed into one another,” said Rukmini Sanyal, research analyst for the Middle East and Africa at the Economist Intelligence Unit.</p> <p>Regional political volatility is becoming entrenched, causing a slow erosion of democratic gains, she said.</p> <p>And there's often widespread support for the government overthrows within the countries because people hope it will bring about new elections, she added.</p> <p>After last week’s coup in Burkina Faso, people across the country lauded the military takeover, saying it was overdue. In Mali, thousands of protesters took to the streets in support of the ruling military after the West African regional bloc, ECOWAS, imposed sanctions over delayed elections.</p> <p>Guinea's junta also has benefited from the fact that ousted President Alpha Conde had become deeply unpopular because he sought to circumvent term limits and won a third term.</p>

	<p>Governance and rule of law institutions are weak in many countries in the region, says Corinne Dufka, West Africa director for Human Rights Watch.</p> <p>“And when societies are tested by insecurity and profound brutality against civilians, it may make some people more willing to accept less democratic military rule,” Dufka said.</p> <p>Some blame the rise in coups on the fact that the juntas know they'll face little more than strongly worded statements. In Mali, Col. Assimi Goita got West African mediators to accept an 18-month transition instead of the year-long one they've asked for.</p> <p>Since then, he's carried out a second coup by getting rid of the original civilian leaders in his transitional government and made himself president instead. He's since pushed back new elections four more years. While ECOWAS has imposed tough economic sanctions, Goita shows few signs of leaving power anytime soon.</p> <p>Ghana's President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, the current ECOWAS chairman, called Thursday on his fellow leaders to address the problem of coups "collectively and decisively before it devastates the whole region.”</p> <p>Critics, though, say the regional body needs to do more than issue statements.</p> <p>“ECOWAS is a reflection of the countries so it means that as far as governance is concerned they have to improve it in each country and in all the regional or global organizations,” said Ablasse Ouedraogo, a former foreign affairs minister in Burkina Faso and president of the political party Faso Differently.</p> <p>Civil society groups say leaders are struggling to meet basic security and governance expectations of their populations creating a breeding ground for coups and that regional bodies like ECOWAS and the African Union are quickly losing credibility.</p> <p>“These institutions act more on the consequences than on the causes of the sociopolitical crises that lead to coups,” said Chrysogone Zougmore, president of the Burkina Faso Movement for Human Rights.</p> <p>Meanwhile aid groups responding to the dire humanitarian needs across the region say pulling people out of crisis will take time no matter who's in power. Hassane Hamadou, director of the Norwegian Refugee Council in Burkina Faso, says new, dismal records are being broken every month.</p> <p>"Violence has claimed the lives of around 3,000 civilians, forced thousands of schools to shut down and driven 1.6 million people into displacement, a jaw-dropping 18-fold increase over the past three years,” Hamadou said. “In this context, there can be no quick fix nor easy answer.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/05 Concern: Texas National Guard deployment
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/suicides-living-conditions-spark-concern-texas-national-guard/story?id=82540700
GIST	<p>Members of the Texas National Guard deployed to the southern border under Gov. Greg Abbott’s controversial immigration initiative, Operation Lone Star, are raising several concerns about their mission, including reports that some guardsmen have died in suspected suicides.</p> <p>The Texas National Guard and the Department of Public Safety have been collaborating under Operation Lone Star to stem what they describe as the flow of undocumented immigrants coming across the southern border and to combat drug trafficking.</p> <p>ABC News has spoken to three soldiers in the Guard who asked that their names not be used so they can talk freely about the issues they say are affecting morale among some of their fellow service members deployed to the border.</p>

They say those problems have ranged from pay delays to poor housing arrangements and inadequate training to assist Border Patrol in apprehending immigrants. Some of the guardsmen who spoke to ABC News say word of the suspected suicides of four members of the National Guard since October has also prompted them to come forward. The concerns raised by these members of the Guard add to the mounting pressure the program has already faced from Democratic lawmakers and advocates who say the mission violates the rights of immigrants who should be given the opportunity to seek asylum in the United States without fear of being detained for weeks at a time.

In recent months, dozens of state lawmakers and members of Congress have called on the Department of Justice to investigate Operation Lone Star, citing concerns over civil rights violations and the reported suicides. In December 2021, the ACLU of Texas and other civil rights groups asked the DOJ to investigate the mission, which authorizes members of the National and state law enforcement agencies to detain or arrest migrants suspected of trespassing on private or state property. They cited alleged incidents of racial profiling and cases where migrants were lured onto private land so they could be arrested.

“What we found is that officials are targeting Black and brown migrants in arrests and are frequently luring them in situations in which they are unknowingly on private property without permission,” ACLU of Texas lawyer Kate Huddleston told ABC News in a previous interview. “In 70% of cases charges are being dropped but that’s only after people are spending weeks in jail.”

Abbott’s office pushed back against the criticism in a statement to ABC News.

“It comes as no surprise that Democrats who support President Biden's reckless and dangerous open border policies disagree with Governor Abbott's resolve to do the President's job and actually try to secure the border,” said Nan Tolson, a spokesperson for Abbott. “Those legislators should listen to the complaints the Governor has heard during dozens of visits to border communities--complaints by constituents who are suffering the consequences of almost 2 million immigrants crossing the border illegally in the past 12 months.”

A mission that quickly expanded

Abbott launched Operation Lone Star in March 2021, dispatching Texas National Guard, Department of Public Safety officers and other state resources to control the rising number of immigrant crossings at the border.

In less than a year, the originally voluntary operation of about 500 National Guardsmen has escalated to a mandatory activation of over 10,000 troops.

Former enlisted senior adviser to the Texas National Guard, Sgt. Maj. Jason Featherston, said he believes four reported recent incidents of the unit’s soldiers dying by suicide, including one who served under his leadership a few years back, are directly tied to the rapid escalation and poor execution of the program.

“This should have been planned, this was just a knee-jerk reaction to get people out there and no one took into account the individual soldier and what their needs are,” Featherston said. “That’s a mistake because if you’re not taking care of the soldier he is going to be distracted and they’re not going to focus on the mission and that is what is happening now.”

Since he retired in November, Featherston has been advocating for guardsmen on the front lines of the mission. Soldiers he has spoken to have complained about a lack of cold weather gear and Individual First Aid Kits (IFAKS). Others have said that pay delays are putting a strain on their spouses who struggle to pay bills when they’re away on duty. Featherston says that military leaders have prioritized quick mobilization over the needs of each guardsman.

The [Army Times](#) was first to report on four suspected suicides of guardsmen who were serving or set to be deployed under Operation Lone Star.

ABC News has not been able to reach the families of the soldiers who died or confirm that all were connected to Operation Lone Star, but military documents describe the death of one soldier who was currently deployed under the operation as a “confirmed suicide.” Another soldier was found inside a vehicle with “an apparent gunshot wound to the head with his right hand still holding the firearm,” according to the documents.

Suicides draw concern

The military documents reviewed by ABC News show that one guardsman, Pfc. Joshua Cortez, submitted a hardship request to be relieved from duty. Cortez noted he had missed his first opportunity to get hired for a job when he was deployed on a previous mission, but was on his way to getting hired for this “lifetime job” at an insurance company.

He included additional documentation that indicated the company was moving forward with the hiring process and wanted to set up an interview.

His request was denied by two of three commanders who reviewed it, with one of them writing “Soldier can deploy. If offered a job then soldier can be given time for training.” The comment was dated on Nov. 4. Less than two days later, an incident report reviewed by ABC News showed Cortez shot himself in a parking lot.

The Texas Military Department, which has been collaborating with the Texas Department of Public Safety to deploy personnel and resources to the border has, cautioned against connecting the deaths to Operation Lone Star.

“There has been misleading and false information publicized without proper context or relevant information, irrespective of family sensitivity and desires,” Texas Military Department public affairs staff told ABC News in an email. “Two of the four service members publicized by media outlets were mobilized in support of Operation Lone Star. However, there is no evidence to support that their decisions were made as a result of Operation Lone Star... It would be irresponsible journalism at this point in time to tie these tragedies to Operation Lone Star, and to not respect the wishes of grieving family members.”

In late January, 50 Texas House Democrats signed a letter calling on the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice to investigate and end Operation Lone Star. The letter said members of the Texas legislature had received an email from a soldier with concerns about the mission.

“Furthermore, on Dec. 24, 2021, Members of the Texas Legislature and of Congress received an anonymous email from a Soldier in the Texas Army expressing grave concerns with Operation Lone Star, including four reported deaths by suicide of Texas Guardsmen over the course of the operation,” lawmakers wrote.

“We should ignore the governor’s attempts to deflect responsibility for the deaths of Guardsmen whom he is using as political pawns and get to the bottom of the causes for these tragedies,” lawmakers wrote.

The DOJ declined to comment when asked by ABC News if they’ve responded to the calls for an investigation.

News of the suicides has shocked the military community. Some soldiers currently deployed under Operation Lone Star said the deaths should call attention to the stresses the mission is causing. One soldier told ABC News he knew one of the deceased members and acknowledged that while several factors often contribute to a suicide, being deployed at a moment’s notice is a major stressor.

“I do think that a lot of the stress is that they yanked people out from their lives,” he said.

Housing and pay concerns

One of the soldiers interviewed by ABC News said he was given less than a week to prepare for his deployment last fall, which he was told would last around 120 days. Once he arrived at his station, he was

told his deployment would be extended to at least a year of mandatory service. Soldiers have been living for months in RVs that have been retrofitted to house several soldiers, raising concerns over COVID-19 exposure.

“This type of mission being in our backyards — you would think that you didn’t have to pack us like sardines, six to a trailer,” the soldier said.

Another soldier told ABC News, that although they’re used to living in different conditions when deployed, military leaders did not tell soldiers what to pack for. While some soldiers have been living in old hotels or rental homes, others have been sleeping in the RVs.

“They look like massive six-wheel trailers with slide outs that have two bathrooms and either between 12 and 20 beds,” he said. “So there was a lot of uncertainty — soldiers didn’t know where they were going to be living.”

In a statement titled “Setting the Record Straight on Operation Lone Star,” the Texas Military Department pushed back on what they called “inaccurate reports and social media posts” about issues related to living conditions and lack equipment.

“Our personnel are trained to operate and adapt in austere environments at home and abroad,” Col. Rita Holton, Texas Military Department’s public affairs officer said. “Commanders in the field have identified areas of improvement in regards to equipment and living conditions and are actively working with vendors and supply chains to execute those solutions.”

When soldiers leave their civilian lives behind, they also leave their jobs and rely on their National Guard salary. Yet some members of the National Guard ordered to the border have reported not receiving their paychecks on time or getting paid the wrong amounts during their deployment for this mission.

Another soldier ABC interviewed, said he has tried to help resolve some of the payroll issues lower-ranking soldiers have raised to him, but added that checks are still being sent to soldiers with the wrong amounts.

“I have multiple reports from my guys having pay issues and not being paid on time. Some of them are getting direct deposits and some of them are getting checks that are incorrect,” he said. “I have a single soldier who is making more than soldiers with dependents. Yeah, it’s just a pay fiasco.”

According to the statement released by the Texas Military Department, a new pay system for state active-duty missions was installed after the agency found issues with the former pay system following Hurricane Harvey. The agency said it was identifying and addressing gaps within the new system.

Every soldier ABC News spoke to said they did not feel they were being properly trained to help detain or arrest migrants.

“What are we out here for?” asked the guardsman who was dispatched to the border with less than a week to prepare. “There’s a whole bunch of better resources you could have used the money for instead of just throwing us out on these ranch roads just sitting there.”

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HEADLINE	02/06 Russia new daily Covid record tenfold spike
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/russia-hits-daily-covid-record-180000-cases-82704943
GIST	<p>MOSCOW -- Russia is reporting a record daily count of new coronavirus infections of 180,071, a tenfold spike from a month ago as the highly contagious omicron variant spreads through the country.</p> <p>The figure released by the state coronavirus task force on Sunday was about 2,800 cases more than recorded the previous day and continued a surge that began in mid-January, when daily new cases were around 17,000.</p>

Although the number of infections has increased dramatically in recent weeks, the task force reported that daily deaths from COVID-19 are holding steady or marginally declining: 661 deaths were recorded over the past 24 hours, compared with 796 on Jan. 6.

For the entire course of the pandemic, the task force has reported 12.8 million infections and 335,414 deaths.

Despite the soaring infections, President Vladimir Putin told Russia's top business association last week that authorities are not planning any lockdowns or other additional restrictions because of the surge. Moreover, the government lifted the seven-day self-isolation restrictions for those who come into contact with COVID-19 patients.

Faced with the biggest virus surge yet, Russian authorities have generally resisted imposing any major restrictions and repeatedly rejected the idea of introducing a lockdown.

Russia had only one, six-week lockdown in 2020, and in October 2021 many people were also ordered to stay off work for about a week. But beside that, life in most of the country remained largely normal, with even mask mandates being loosely enforced.

In recent weeks, a growing number of Russian regions have started introducing restrictions for those under 18, as officials noted that the current surge affects children much more than the previous ones. In many areas, schools have either switched to remote learning or extended holidays for students. In St. Petersburg, Russia's second largest city, minors have been temporarily barred from most public places.

Russia started vaccinating children aged 12-17 only last month with the domestically developed Sputnik M jab, which is the same as Sputnik V but contains a smaller dose. According to media reports and social media users, only small amounts of vaccine for teenagers have been made available.

Only about half of Russia's 146-million population has been vaccinated so far, even though the country was among the first in the world to roll out COVID-19 shots.

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HEADLINE	02/05 US restores Iran sanctions waiver
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/5/biden-restores-iran-sanctions-waver-scramble-retur/
GIST	<p>President Biden has restored sanctions waivers allowing for certain countries to participate in Iranian civil nuclear projects as the administration presses forward on talks to salvage the Obama-era Iran nuclear deal.</p> <p>The State Department said the waivers were not granted as part of a “concession to Iran” but were “issued as part of a policy discretion.”</p> <p>“We are issuing the waiver now for a simple reason: it will enable some of our international partners to have more detailed technical discussions to enable cooperation that we view as being in our non-proliferation interests,” a senior State Department official said.</p> <p>The administration said restoring the waivers was critical for returning to the negotiating table with Iran in the hopes of returning to the nuclear agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).</p> <p>“The waiver with respect to these activities is designed to facilitate discussions that would help to close a deal on a mutual return to full implementation of the JCPOA and lay the groundwork for Iran’s return to performance of its JCPOA commitments,” the State Department said in a notice to Congress obtained by the Associated Press.</p>

The so-called “civ-nuke” waivers restored by the Biden Administration specifically allow third countries to work on Iranian civil nuclear projects at the Bushehr nuclear power station, Arak heavy water power, and Tehran Research Reactor.

“Absent this sanctions waiver, detailed technical discussions with third parties regarding the disposition of stockpiles and other activities of nonproliferation value cannot take place,” a senior State Department official said.

Mr. Trump withdrew from the nuclear agreement in 2018 and reimposed the sanctions that had previously been lifted as part of the accord.

Mr. Trump maintained the “civ-nuke” waivers until May 2020, when he removed them as part of his “maximum pressure” campaign.

Mr. Biden has committed to returning to the deal, and U.S. officials have warned that the administration has just weeks to reach an agreement given Iran’s nuclear development progress.

Tehran is demanding that the administration restore sanctions relief granted under the original deal.

Lawmakers have been critical of the administration for reentering the negotiations despite Tehran’s blatant disregard for its commitments under the agreement.

“I am deeply concerned these waivers show the administration is preparing to cut a nuclear deal with Iran that would be worse than the original JCPOA,” said Rep. Michael T. McCaul, the top Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee from Texas. “We already know that Iran will enter any new deal closer to amassing enough fuel for a nuclear weapon than it was under the JCPOA.”

“Another bad deal is worse for our national security than no deal,” he said.

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HEADLINE	02/06 US: Russia could seize Kiev in days
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/06/ukraine-russia-military-putin/
GIST	<p>A senior Russian diplomat dismissed new U.S. military and intelligence assessments — which estimated Russia could seize Kyiv in days and leave up to 50,000 civilians killed or wounded — as alarmist and as unlikely as an attack by Washington on London.</p> <p>“Madness and scaremongering continues. ... what if we would say that US could seize London in a week and cause 300K civilian deaths?” Russia’s deputy ambassador to the United Nations, Dmitry Polyanskiy, tweeted Sunday.</p> <p>And parliamentary deputy Artem Turov, a member of President Vladimir Putin’s United Russia party, accused the United States of disseminating fake information and of “doing everything possible to fan a new conflict.”</p> <p>The updated U.S. military and intelligence assessments briefed to lawmakers and European partners over the past several days were U.S. officials’ bleakest assessment yet of the deteriorating security situation in Ukraine. They came as the Biden administration was also warning that Moscow was considering filming a fake attack against Russian territory or Russian-speaking people by Ukrainian forces as a pretext to invade its neighbor — a claim the Kremlin has strenuously denied.</p> <p>Seven people familiar with the assessments said Russian President Vladimir Putin now has 70 percent of the combat power he needs for an assault that — under the most extreme scenario — could quickly take out the capital, Kyiv, and remove the country’s democratically elected president, Volodymyr Zelensky. Such an invasion, they said, could trigger a refugee crisis in Europe as up to 5 million people flee.</p>

As of Friday, there were 83 Russian battalion tactical groups, with about 750 troops each, arrayed for a possible assault. That is up from 60 two weeks ago.

The White House has said the United States does not have information that Putin has made a decision to invade. But satellite imagery and other intelligence indicate he has amassed more than 100,000 troops and equipment on the border with Ukraine — one Western security official put the number at 130,000 — potentially positioning for what could become the largest military land offensive in Europe since World War II.

“Our worry would be that you don’t park battle groups ... on the border of another country twice and do nothing,” one European official said, referring to an earlier buildup last year. “I think that’s the real fear that I have. [Putin’s] now put them all out there. If he does nothing again ... what does that say to the wider international community about the might of Russia?”

The European official and others familiar with the assessments spoke on the condition of anonymity about intelligence matters.

As the United States moved to strengthen NATO defenses in Eastern Europe, the head of the Belarusian Security Council Alexander Volfovich said there would be “very large” military maneuvers with Russian forces in southern Belarus in coming days, in response to tensions between NATO and Russia over Ukraine. Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko has been [playing](#) a key role in Russia’s saber-rattling against Ukraine.

U.S. officials are concerned that the massive military exercise with Russia and Belarus, beginning Feb. 10, could be used as part of a multi-pronged invasion of Ukraine. The exercise has seen Russian troops and equipment travel more than 6,000 miles to Belarus, and the deployment of advanced missile systems, fighter planes and bombers.

Moscow has denied that it intends to invade Ukraine, but it has made clear it considers the presence of Western troops and weapons in the former Soviet sphere an unacceptable security threat. Putin has accused the United States and its European allies of ignoring his key demands to bar Ukraine from joining NATO, rule out putting offensive strike weapons on Russia’s borders and roll back the NATO’s weaponry and force posture to its 1997 boundaries.

Russia also has attempted to paint Ukraine as the aggressor in the crisis, warning a NATO-backed Kyiv could try to take back Crimea, which was annexed by Moscow in 2014. Meanwhile, some Ukrainian officials, including [President Zelensky](#), have taken issue with Washington’s description of Russian deployments and the likelihood of an “imminent” attack, fearing it will [cause panic](#) and hurt Ukraine’s economy.

Volfovich accused Ukraine of threatening Belarus in comments reported on BelTA state news agency Sunday. “We did not consider the southern direction as a threat to the country’s security before, but today, based on the assessment of the military-political, strategic situation, we are forced to consider the southern direction as well,” Volfovich said.

Volfovich’s comments came after 2,000 U.S. troops arrived in Poland and Germany Sunday to bolster European security, amid Russia’s massive military build-up on Ukraine’s borders and inside Belarus.

Lukashenko, Russia’s closest ally, echoed Russian claims throughout the crisis that the threat of war comes not from Russia but from Ukraine and NATO. Still, he boasted that Ukraine could not afford to risk a war with Russian and Belarusian forces because “such a war would last a maximum three or four days.” He added that NATO was also afraid of a military confrontation with Russia and Belarus.

“They (NATO) would still be getting ready to deploy there and send some troops there, while we would already standing at the English Channel, and they know it,” Lukashenko said in an interview with Russian

state television anchor Vladimir Solovyov. “They understand that it is futile to fight with us, first of all with Russia.”

Although U.S. officials believe an assault could be launched any day, optimal conditions are believed to come between mid-February and the end of March, when Ukraine’s flat, open terrain and the rivers cross-crossing it are frozen and armored vehicles can maneuver easily.

One possibility is that Putin may delay until after the Winter Olympics in Beijing conclude Feb. 20, in order not to upset China by overshadowing the games and threaten Chinese financial assistance in response to U.S. sanctions.

An association of retired military officers led by retired Colonel General Leonid Ivashov, the All-Russian Officers’ Assembly, called on President Vladimir Putin to avoid a war, arguing there were no critical external threats to Russia. Ivashov predicted a war would lead to a crisis in Russia, and potentially an uprising.

“Attempts to make people ‘love’ the Russian Federation and its leadership using ultimatums and threats of force are pointless and extremely dangerous,” Ivashov said in a statement. “The use of military force against Ukraine would, first, call into question the existence of Russia itself as a state; second, it would make Russians and Ukrainians mortal enemies forever,” said the letter.

The association called on Russian President Vladimir Putin to “renounce his criminal policy of provoking a war, in which Russia would be alone against the united forces of the West.”

The latest grim assessment from U.S. officials indicates the window for negotiating a diplomatic solution to the crisis is closing.

President Biden is set to meet this week with new German Chancellor [Olaf Scholz](#), who has been accused of [not doing enough](#) to respond to Russian aggression. Germany has been reluctant to export arms to Ukraine, much to the consternation of Kyiv, though Scholz has recently indicated that “all options” — including the controversial Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline that would deepen Berlin’s reliance on Moscow for energy — are on the table for sanctions in the case of a renewed Russian invasion.

Putin, meanwhile, has been reinforcing his own diplomatic support network. After a meeting Friday with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the opening of the Winter Olympics, the two leaders issued a lengthy [communiqué](#) affirming their mutual grievances over global issues including NATO expansion and security alliances in the Asia-Pacific region.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken is set to travel to Australia and the Pacific this week for talks, including a gathering of his counterparts from India, Australia and Japan, who are part of an emerging partnership, [known as the Quad](#), united in their misgivings about China.

A Russian invasion of Ukraine could “embarrass Beijing,” because “it suggests that China is willing to tolerate or tacitly support Russia’s efforts to coerce Ukraine,” Daniel Kritenbrink, the top U.S. diplomat for East Asia, told reporters Friday in a briefing ahead of the visit.

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HEADLINE	02/06 IOC to improve quarantine hotel conditions
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/olympics/2022/02/06/olympic-quarantine-hotels-conditions/
GIST	<p>BEIJING — Following complaints about poor living conditions from athletes placed in isolation after positive coronavirus tests, an International Olympic Committee official promised Sunday to make improvements.</p> <p>“We have found ourselves once in a situation where we’re not necessarily meeting the conditions that we expected,” Christian Dubi, an IOC executive director, said at a briefing Sunday. “... It is addressed, and it’s very unfortunate that it affected an athlete. It’s been addressed.”</p>

Some Olympic athletes who have been placed in quarantine hotels after positive tests [have complained](#) about small portions of substandard food and insufficient access to training equipment. Athletes from the team representing the Russian Olympic Committee and Germany have called the conditions challenging or worse.

“My stomach hurts, I’m very pale and I have huge black circles around my eyes. I want all this to end. I cry every day. I’m very tired,” Russian biathlete Valeria Vasnetsova said on Instagram, [according to the Associated Press](#).

A German official earlier called conditions “unacceptable” for the country’s three quarantined athletes, but told reporters Sunday that they had improved.

“We have succeeded since yesterday in achieving a marked improvement in conditions for the athletes,” German official Dirk Schimmelpfennig said, [according to Reuters](#).

But other issues persisted. Jukka Jalonen, the coach of the Finland men’s hockey team, said quarantined forward Marko Anttila was “not getting great food” and “would like to have more energy and better food there as well,” [Reuters reported](#).

Belgian skeleton racer Kim Meylemans [wept through an Instagram post last week](#) about her sense of isolation and lack of information about why she had been separated from other athletes. Others have said they don’t have access to equipment to train. American bobsledding star Elana Meyers Taylor [initially had only a single weight plate to use in her quarantine](#), although she was later provided more extensive equipment, including an exercise bike.

“Let’s be thorough, very thorough in the future, to make sure that Internet connections, food, size of the rooms, equipment for training, everything is perfect for these athletes that do suffer from the conditions,” Dubi, the IOC official, said.

An official from the Beijing Organizing Committee said quarantined athletes would be allowed to order delivery food from the Olympic Village going forward, [according to the AP](#).

Vague procedures for quarantining was one of the many things that alarmed athletes in the months before these Olympics. Since Jan. 23, [more than 140 athletes and team officials](#) have tested positive at the Games, either upon arriving to Beijing or within [the “closed loop” set up by organizers](#). Officials have said that with fewer new arrivals as the Games go on, they are expecting fewer positive cases.

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HEADLINE	02/05 Minneapolis suspends no-knock warrants
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/02/05/no-knock-warrants-amir-locke/
GIST	<p>The fatal shooting of 22-year-old Amir Locke by Minneapolis police on Wednesday has renewed scrutiny of no-knock raids, the practice that drew nationwide outrage two years ago after Louisville police killed Breonna Taylor during a similar operation.</p> <p>Taylor’s killing sparked condemnation of how no-knock raids — and police raids in general — are executed and enforced around the country. Slow progress on reforming and regulating the practice has raid victims and justice advocates continuing to press for meaningful change.</p> <p>Both Locke’s and Taylor’s deaths resemble a situation that one policing expert called many people’s “worst nightmare”: While a person is asleep at home at night, armed men burst in with little to no warning.</p> <p>“This is kind of the most serious thing the government can do,” said Barry Friedman, faculty director of the Policing Project at New York University’s law school. “You’d think it’s the most regulated, and there’s almost no regulation.”</p>

Locke's death in the no-knock raid has re-inflamed tensions in Minneapolis, where residents are still grappling with the fallout from George Floyd's 2020 murder — the trial of [three of the officers who arrested Floyd is underway](#).

"We have a city that just refuses to learn," Jeff Storms, a civil rights attorney for Locke's family, said Friday. "We continue to be known for these colossal civil rights failures. And so now the question is, is the city going to hold itself accountable? And can we believe the city anymore when it says it's going to learn from its own mistakes?"

What has happened since Locke's death?

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey (D) announced Friday the city would suspend the use of no-knock warrants — those in which officers enter a property without first announcing their presence.

"To ensure safety of both the public and officers until a new policy is crafted, I'm issuing a moratorium on both the request and execution of such warrants in Minneapolis," Frey said in a statement.

"No matter what information comes to light, it won't change the fact that Amir Locke's life was cut short," Frey added, noting the [body-camera footage from the incident](#) "raises more questions than answers."

Frey said the city has tapped experts to advise officials on revamping the police search warrant unit, including Peter Kraska, a professor of police studies at Eastern Kentucky University who helped craft state legislation for regulating no-knock raids after Taylor's death.

A caravan of demonstrators briefly blocked traffic late Friday to protest Locke's killing. Hundreds of demonstrators filled the streets of downtown Minneapolis again Saturday evening, [local media reported](#).

What happened during the raid on Locke's apartment?

In an echo of Floyd's arrest, [body-camera footage](#) from the raid undermined the police's initial account of the incident.

Amelia Huffman, the interim Minneapolis police chief, said during a Wednesday news conference that officers "loudly and repeatedly announced [a] police search warrant before crossing the threshold into the apartment" and said Locke pointed a loaded gun "in the direction of officers," prompting one of them to fire at him.

But body-camera footage released the next day showed a chaotic scene that unfolded in less than 10 seconds. Officers are seen unlocking the door with a key before rushing into the apartment as they announce themselves. Locke, who is wrapped in a blanket as police train their lights on him, is seen with a gun in his hand, but it is not clear from the video whether he points it.

Locke's parents said he owned the gun legally and had it to protect himself from carjackers while making deliveries for DoorDash.

The warrant related to a homicide in nearby St. Paul; Minneapolis police were executing the warrant as an assist to the neighboring department since the search location was in Minneapolis's jurisdiction. Notably, St. Paul police did not request a no-knock search from a judge; MPD insisted on the change and refused to serve the warrant unless it was a no-knock, [NBC affiliate KARE-11 reported](#).

The warrants in the underlying case that led to the raid that left Locke dead remained under seal as of Saturday.

It's not clear what information police had that led them to the apartment, which Locke appeared to be visiting. Marlon Cornelius Speed, the 23-year-old man who lived in the apartment whose address was reportedly on the warrant, had past run-ins with the police, [Minneapolis Public Radio reported, citing court records](#).

Police confirmed that Locke did not have a criminal record. Locke's parents said their son was a good kid who grew up respecting police. Locke aspired to work in music and had already filed paperwork and designed a logo for a business, [the Associated Press reported](#).

How do no-knock warrants work?

While the Fourth Amendment generally offers protection from “unreasonable search and seizure,” police officers can petition a judge to sign off on a no-knock warrant that allows for unannounced entry in severe situations.

“The theory of the no-knock is that if the person [in the residence] is armed and knows the police are entering, they might shoot,” Friedman said, “no-knock lets police get in and secure the situation without being fired upon.”

“But that logic is ridiculous,” he said, “most people, if it’s announced police are armed and outside, they’re going to come out.”

No-knock warrants are most commonly issued in drug crimes where police may argue that being authorized to conduct a raid unannounced means potential suspects can’t destroy evidence before police get inside.

From Friedman’s viewpoint, no-knock warrants are just a subset of the larger problem of when and how police are authorized to raid homes.

“Even if [police] announce themselves, they can enter quickly,” he said. “The bigger problem is the extent that we use militarized raids to enter people’s residences.”

What are the concerns over no-knock warrants?

Reform advocates, including Kraska of the University of Eastern Kentucky, call no-knock warrants high-risk and low-reward.

“These raids are a form of investigation inside people’s residences, more than 90 percent of the time, looking for the possibility of small-time drug offenses,” he said. “It’s not for serial rapists, murderers or human traffickers.”

The risks are myriad, ranging from property damage to death, and often target the wrong people entirely — as in the case of Locke, who was not the subject of the warrant that led to the raid. Botched raids can also traumatize those swept up in the chaos.

[In one high-profile incident in Chicago](#), a half-dozen officers broke down the door of Anjanette Young unannounced as she was undressing before bed. Young didn’t have enough notice to cover herself before she was handcuffed, forcing her to stand naked for almost a half-hour before police realized they had the wrong address.

In 2017, a tactical unit with the New York City Police Department shot and killed 69-year-old Mario Sanabria after surprising him during a no-knock raid. Sanabria had grabbed a machete at the sound of people breaking into his home and speaking no English, did not understand police commands. Officers had come to search Sanabria’s home for his nephew.

As of 2010, the conservative estimate for the number of no-knock raids nationwide was near 60,000 — an exponential increase from the 1980s when there were “a few thousand a year,” Kraska said.

“It was just something that even the police in those days couldn’t fathom: breaking into people’s private residences looking for contraband,” he said. “It was seen as too dangerous, and it was seen as going against constitutional sensibilities that you would do that.”

Where have they been banned?

Three states have banned the use of no-knock warrants: Florida, Oregon and [Virginia](#).

Since Taylor's death in 2020, at least a dozen municipalities have passed laws banning or limiting the use of no-knock warrants, [including Lexington, Ky.](#), and St. Louis (which bans them for drug cases).

For Friedman, the NYU professor, regulating raids through legislation is the best solution. But while momentum for change was strong in the aftermath of Taylor's killing, it has since shifted back toward a familiar "law and order" approach.

"Politicians nationwide got cold feet," Friedman said. "Ultimately with some cities experiencing rising homicide rates, there was all the political ammo necessary to squash the movement. Politicians are worried about being soft on crime."

"It's the same narrative, different era," he added.

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HEADLINE	02/06 Conspiracists close Texas butterfly refuge
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/06/us/butterfly-center-texas.html
GIST	<p>MISSION, Texas — For nearly two decades, the National Butterfly Center has provided a place of wonder along the banks of the Rio Grande, attracting curious visitors and nature enthusiasts from around the country to watch delicate creatures like the xami hairstreak float over flowers and alight on logs.</p> <p>Among those who trade in outlandish right-wing conspiracies online, though, the center is said to be something else: a cover for human smuggling, sex trafficking and the exploitation of children. The lies have spread so widely in recent years that the center is now receiving visitors with no interest in butterflies at all.</p> <p>Last month, a Republican congressional candidate from Virginia came to the center looking for a site of human smugglers and had a physical altercation with its director. Days later, a man from an upstart media organization associated with Steve Bannon recorded a video outside the center's gates, claiming "credible threats of the cartels trafficking children through the butterfly center." To make his point, he held up a tiny shoe.</p> <p>On Wednesday, as butterflies fluttered across winter-browned grasses, frenzied staff members packed files, fielded messages from saddened supporters and hung a sign on the gate: "Closed until further notice." Nearby, a newly installed police guard tower flashed red and blue.</p> <p>In a country where many believe that Satan-worshiping pedophiles run the government and the resurrection of John F. Kennedy Jr. will restore a Trump presidency, the butterfly center has become the latest unlikely victim of wild misinformation and outright lies spreading rapidly online. It has become a borderland version of Comet Ping Pong, the Washington pizzeria that became the center of the baseless Pizzagate conspiracy theory, which claimed that Democrats were running a child sex trafficking ring in the restaurant. That lie spread so far that it prompted a North Carolina man to drive to the pizzeria and fire an assault rifle inside.</p> <p>Becoming the focus of this type of attention has terrified and infuriated the staff at the butterfly center, some of whom have taken steps to protect themselves online and at work.</p> <p>"The kind of activity, the kind of chatter going on — these are the kinds of things that happen before other horrible events where people ended up dying," said Dr. Jeffrey Glassberg, the president of the nonprofit North American Butterfly Association, which runs the butterfly center in Mission.</p> <p>He feared that someone who believed the lies could resort to violence, and cited the mass killer who targeted Hispanic shoppers at a Walmart in El Paso in 2019, amid a similarly heated debate over border security.</p>

“We know it’s a dangerous lie,” said Dr. Glassberg, 74, a lifelong lover of butterflies who also [developed the process of DNA fingerprinting](#). “People say you’re raping babies, then unhinged people come out of the woodwork.”

When people began showing up at the butterfly center, the nonprofit decided it needed to do more to provide security for staff members and visitors. It would remain closed, he said, until a plan could be developed for how to do so.

Created nearly two decades ago by Dr. Glassberg, the butterfly center in Mission, was built on the site of a former onion field. The recent trouble began in 2017 as President Donald J. Trump pushed to build new sections of border wall. The center did not support construction of the wall through its 100-acre property.

The center and its staff have endured attacks by conservative figures and from Mr. Bannon’s “We Build the Wall,” a crowdfunding campaign that raised millions to construct a border barrier on private land near the butterfly center. Mr. Bannon and Brian Kolfage, an Iraq War veteran involved in leading the effort, [were indicted by federal prosecutors in 2020 on fraud charges](#). (Mr. Bannon was [pardoned by Mr. Trump](#).)

During the wall-funding campaign, Mr. Kolfage repeatedly attacked the butterfly center on social media. “Instead of enabling women and children to be sex trafficked like @NatButterflies, we are taking action! This is a war for control of the most powerful country,” read one post from his Twitter account in 2019.

“When I took this job, I thought I would be able to spend a good amount of time outdoors: butterflies, birds, educating children, writing grants,” said Marianna Trevino Wright, the center’s executive director since 2012. “Now every day my children literally worry whether I’m going to survive a day at work.”

Ahead of the closure on Wednesday, staff members grabbed files and discussed how to continue their work at home. A groundskeeper volunteered to care for the center’s red snake, carrying it out in a large glass tank along with two frozen rats for food.

Ms. Wright fielded calls from reporters around the country and took care of last-minute paperwork, a pistol in a leather holster on her right hip. Bumper stickers and signs opposing the border wall sat in a pile on a meeting table alongside a glass of red wine.

“The board is going to hate this side arm,” said Ms. Wright, 52, a South Texas native whose father immigrated from Mexico as a young physician. But, she added, the people attacking the center “need to know they’re not the only ones who carry weapons.”

Ms. Wright said she began carrying a pistol at work after her altercation in the center’s colorful reception area with Kimberly Lowe, the candidate for Congress in Virginia.

Ms. Lowe and another woman arrived at the center last month, hoping to walk to the Rio Grande. Ms. Wright, after looking at Ms. Lowe’s Facebook posts, barred them from the property and then swatted away Ms. Lowe’s phone when she started filming. After that, Ms. Wright said, she was “thrown to the ground,” her own phone was taken by the other woman, and Ms. Lowe nearly ran over Ms. Wright’s son with her car.

Ms. Lowe denied any wrongdoing and accused Ms. Wright of being the aggressor. “Because of Marianna’s lies, I’ve lost valuable time on the campaign trail and have constant harassment and death threats,” she said in a statement. A spokesman for the Mission Police Department said the altercation was still under investigation.

Days later, a [border security gathering](#) attracted conservative activists to nearby McAllen with speakers like Michael T. Flynn, the former general and national security adviser to Mr. Trump, and the musician Ted Nugent. On Jan. 30, roughly a hundred attendees marched to a section of border wall near the center, [some armed with long guns, others singing “Amazing Grace.”](#)

After that, the nonprofit board voted to close the butterfly center, while continuing to pay its staff.

The nonprofit has been engaged in a yearslong legal battle with the federal government over Border Patrol activity and against Mr. Bannon's group, accusing the latter of defamation. As the cases drag on, construction of the border wall has crept closer to the center's property, which features wild patches and native plants cultivated to attract butterflies.

The beeping of construction vehicles could be heard from inside the refuge as cranes and earth movers worked on the levee near two sections of wall, each less than a half-mile away.

National Guard troops, deployed to the border by Gov. Greg Abbott last year, have taken up a position on a levee, more than a mile from the border but just outside a back gate of the butterfly center. The troops stand by a camouflage Humvee, assault rifles strapped across their chests, watching for anyone who might appear to be a migrant who crossed illegally.

Walking over the levee on a recent afternoon, Ms. Wright warned the troops of a different kind of arrival from Mexico: She had seen fresh bear tracks zigzagging on a muddy road. Mexican black bears have been spotted on the property before, she said, arriving there from across the river.

The Guard has been a recent addition to an area already crowded with law enforcement. A short walk from the butterfly center is a Border Patrol facility. Nearby, a surveillance tower with sensors and cameras rises over the trees.

In January, two members of the National Guard crashed a truck into a steel Border Patrol gate on the butterfly center's land. Staff members at the center said they found a can of Bud Light tossed into the grass nearby. A Guard spokesman said there was "zero indication" alcohol was involved.

The center has in some ways embraced its unlikely role in the heated political debate over the border. "Proud left wing 'thug' with a 'sham' butterfly agenda," reads a mug on sale at in the gift shop, drawing quotes from Mr. Kolfage's Twitter account.

But most visitors come for nature, not politics. In the hours before the center closed on Wednesday, a handful of people roamed through the dormant formal gardens.

"I moved here from Galveston because of the butterfly center," said Christine Balboni, 63, a retired Coast Guard captain. "I've butterflyed in other places, but this is where you go to get some incredible tropical butterflies that you won't see anywhere else."

She and her friend Lorna Graham walked slowly under a warm winter sun, carrying binoculars and multiple cameras.

"What started me on butterflies is this place," said Ms. Graham, who splits her time between Ontario, Canada, and an RV park in Mission. Both women lamented the state of politics that precipitated the indefinite closure.

"It's just incredibly sad," Ms. Balboni said.

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HEADLINE	02/05 Trucker-led protests spread across Canada
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/05/world/covid-test-vaccine-cases#canadas-capital-paralyzed-by-a-trucker-led-protest-against-vaccine-mandates-braces-for-more-protesters
GIST	OTTAWA — Protesters in Ottawa and other cities across Canada took to the streets on Saturday for the second weekend in a row to continue demonstrations against pandemic restrictions. The demonstrations

that began with truckers critical of vaccine mandates have grown to include a range of other political causes, including opposition to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

While the police and officials braced for rowdy crowds and potential violence, the atmosphere of the demonstrations by midday Saturday, though loud, remained mostly peaceful and festive.

In Ottawa, despite frigid temperatures, a band performed on the street in front of Parliament Hill underneath a Canadian flag dangling from a large construction crane. Nearby, several inflatable bouncy castles were set up, and makeshift canteens throughout downtown dispensed food. At a municipal baseball stadium parking lot that truckers were using for staging and camping, three saunas were brought in.

On the streets, many people walking to the protest greeted one another with raised fists and shouts of “freedom.”

While the demonstrations have not devolved into serious violence, they have nevertheless [paralyzed Ottawa’s downtown core](#) with traffic, noise and complaints of harassment.

“I’m receiving hundreds — and I’m not exaggerating — hundreds of emails telling me: ‘I went out to get groceries, I got yelled at, I got harassed. I got followed down the street, I’m so afraid that I can’t go out,’” Catherine McKenney, the city councilor for the area, said Thursday afternoon.

Throughout the area, many businesses have been closed for the past week, resulting in tens of millions of dollars in lost sales. Those that have remained opened have struggled to enforce provincial mask rules.

About 200 to 250 trucks remained downtown from last Saturday’s demonstration, their drivers frequently honking their air horns. Supporters have been delivering diesel fuel to the truckers, who have stacked firewood in parks and built a small wooden canteen building next to a canal that serves as a popular skating rink in the winter.

In Toronto, dozens of cars, pickup trucks and heavy trucks were parked along the city’s high-end shopping district downtown by midday, north of the closed-off legislature building area, with sounds of horns and shouts of “freedom” ringing out. Protesters held up signs of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and used hockey sticks as flagpoles for Canadian flags and Gadsden flags. People scaled a dump truck, and one man climbed into a tree near the Royal Ontario Museum.

The Toronto Police [announced](#) that they had arrested one man for assault with a weapon, and told the public to steer clear of the demonstrations.

Through GoFundMe, some of the organizers raised 10 million Canadian dollars, about \$7.8 million, but the online service has only turned over about 1 million dollars of that. On Friday evening, the platform said in a statement that after speaking with the police, [it would not release any more of the money](#).

“We now have evidence from law enforcement that the previously peaceful demonstration has become an occupation, with police reports of violence and other unlawful activity,” GoFundMe said.

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HEADLINE	02/05 Pandemic impact seniors; many less active
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/05/health/covid-elderly-mobility.html
GIST	<p>In normal times, Cindy Myers, an executive at a nonprofit organization, is “not a real physical person,” she said. “I work at desk jobs. I’m not a big exerciser.”</p> <p>Still, before the pandemic, Dr. Myers, who is 64 and has a doctorate in organization development, commuted from her home in Petaluma, Calif., to an office in San Francisco. She met friends for lunch or coffee, and she went to restaurants, theaters and lectures with her wife. “There was so much more variety in my life, more locations, more people,” she said. “You’re not cognizant of all the moves you’re making.”</p>

Like many employees, Ms. Myers has now been working remotely for two years, curtailing social and cultural events and forgoing travel. That shift, perhaps exacerbated by a bout of depression in 2020, has taken a physical toll, she said. Her limbs feel weak, her balance rocky; she has fallen several times.

“Basic kinds of movement you take for granted, like walking from one end of the house to the other, are exhausting,” she said. “I’m worried about it.”

Many health experts are worried about worsening physical conditioning and mobility among older adults since Covid-19 upended the daily routine. Recent research indicates that many of those who had mild to moderate infections, even some who have managed to avoid the virus altogether, may be suffering functional declines.

To date, much of the attention paid to the pandemic’s effects on the older population has focused on its frightful [mortality rate](#): Nearly three-quarters of Americans who have died have been 65 or older.

Researchers have also reported that, unsurprisingly, older adults whose Covid symptoms became serious enough to require hospitalization often contended with [persistent physical and mental health problems](#).

“When you’re hospitalized and you’re older, it takes a long time to get back on your feet,” said Marla Beauchamp, who researches mobility, aging and chronic disease at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. “Covid is still impacting them in a significant way months and months later.”

But less severe disease can also affect their physical ability. Dr. Beauchamp led a recent [study of Canadians over 50](#) who had confirmed, probable or suspected Covid in 2020, when testing was not widely available. The study revealed worsened mobility among those with mild to moderate illness — 93 percent of whom were never hospitalized — compared with those without Covid.

Nearly half of those 65 and older who had contracted Covid reported less ability to engage in physical activity like walking and exercising than before the pandemic — but so did about one-quarter of those who did not become infected. Smaller proportions of those uninfected said their ability to move around the house, and to do housework like dishwashing and dusting, had also declined.

Although some of that decline might reflect normal aging, the study measured changes over only a nine-month period. In people who did not develop Covid, “the most plausible reason for the decline is public health restrictions during the pandemic,” Dr. Beauchamp said.

Declines in physical function are showing up in older Americans, too. A University of Michigan team [surveyed about 2,000 American adults](#) aged 50 to 80 in early 2021, asking about their activity levels (but not about their Covid status).

It found that almost 40 percent of those over 65 reported both reduced physical activity and less daily time spent on their feet since the start of the pandemic in March 2020. In this representative national sample, those factors were associated with worsened physical conditioning and mobility.

“It’s a cascade of effects,” said Geoffrey Hoffman, a health-services researcher at the university’s School of Nursing and the lead author of the study. “You start with changes in activity levels. That results in worsened function. That in turn is associated with both falls and fear of falling.”

Dr. Beauchamp added: “It’s really concerning to see this decrease in mobility. This is telling us that the pandemic alone has had a significant impact on older adults.”

Neither of these observational studies, in Canada or in the United States, explored reasons for the self-reported increase in physical decline. But their authors suggested that pandemic-related restrictions could have caused deconditioning, even in people who were not ill.

Not only did gyms, yoga studios, pools, adult day programs, community and senior centers all close for extended periods; many older people also undertook fewer ordinary chores and errands and may have skipped recreational pastimes.

“If you’re limiting visits to the grocery store or having groceries delivered, or not going to visit or help with your grandchildren, if you’re not meeting friends at a coffee shop — those all take a certain level of physical activity,” Dr. Beauchamp said.

Many older people did less traveling or in-person shopping; religious services, family gatherings and [medical appointments](#) moved online. “Picture how much activity we do without even thinking about it,” Dr. Hoffman said. When that changes substantially, “it adds up over six or nine months, then you have loss of balance or muscle strength, which leads to more trips and falls.”

Disparities in health and income also appear to play a role, with reduced physical conditioning and mobility more commonly reported, in both countries, by respondents in low-income categories, in fair or poor health or with multiple chronic conditions.

“Relatively healthy older adults have sufficient reserve if they reduce activity,” said Neil Alexander, a geriatrician at the University of Michigan and Ann Arbor Veterans Affairs who was not involved in the study. “High-risk people may be driving these numbers.”

Dr. Alexander also pointed out that early in the pandemic, older patients had less access to rehabilitation and other services. “It was difficult to get people into the home for occupational therapy and physical therapy,” he said. “The support services to keep people mobile and functioning were disrupted.” Now, work force shortages may be having a similar effect, he noted.

Physical function is key to living independently — the future that a great majority of older people envision for themselves. A loss of mobility and function across a considerable proportion of the senior population could mean increasing disability, a greater need for eventual long-term care, and higher Medicare and Medicaid costs.

But that is not inevitable, Dr. Hoffman said: “You can reverse deconditioning. You can recover mobility.”

Dr. Hoffman would like to see Medicare, which covers hip fracture surgery and rehabilitation after serious falls, underwrite extensive “pre-habilitation,” to rebuild the strength and balance of beneficiaries and prevent falls and fractures. He hoped that doctors conducting annual Medicare wellness visits would ask about fall risks and refer deconditioned patients to occupational and physical therapy.

In the interim, individuals can resume walking, enroll in yoga or tai chi classes (outdoors, online, or seated in chairs, as needed), join fall-prevention programs, even practice getting in and out of chairs and lifting small weights on their own. (People should consult a doctor or physical therapist first if they have become severely deconditioned, however.)

“You want to do everything you can to be as active and mobile as possible,” Dr. Beauchamp said.

Dr. Myers, having found that “simply going about my daily routine isn’t enough to bring back my stamina and strength,” has a portable exercise bike set up in front of her television. She uses it, she said, but not often enough, a pattern she wants to change.

“I need an intervention,” she said. “This isn’t the way I want to live.”

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HEADLINE	02/06 ‘Marked acceleration’ NKorea missile tests
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/06/marked-acceleration-in-north-korea-missile-testing-say-un-experts

North Korea has continued to develop its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, including its capability to produce nuclear fissile materials in violation of UN security council resolutions, UN experts have said in a report.

The panel of experts said in the executive summary of the report obtained on Saturday night by Associated Press that there was “a marked acceleration” of Pyongyang’s testing and demonstration of new short-range and possibly medium-range missiles through January, “incorporating both ballistic and guidance technologies and using both solid and liquid propellants”.

“New technologies tested included a possible hypersonic guiding warhead and a manoeuvrable re-entry vehicle,” the panel said. North Korea also demonstrated “increased capabilities for rapid deployment, wide mobility (including at sea), and improved resilience of its missile forces”.

The experts said North Korea “continued to seek material, technology and knowhow for these programmes overseas, including through cyber means and joint scientific research”.

A year ago, the panel said North Korea had modernised its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles by flouting UN sanctions, using cyber-attacks to help finance its programmes and continuing to seek material and technology overseas for its arsenal, including in Iran.

Cyber-attacks, particularly on cryptocurrency assets, remained an important revenue source for Kim Jong-un’s government, the experts monitoring the implementation of sanctions against the North said in the new report.

In recent months, North Korea has launched a variety of weapons systems and threatened to lift the four-year moratorium on more serious weapons tests such as nuclear explosions and ICBM launches. In January there were a record nine missile launches, and other weapons it recently tested include a developmental hypersonic missile and a submarine-launched missile.

The security council initially imposed sanctions on North Korea after its first nuclear test explosion in 2006 and made them tougher in response to further nuclear tests and the country’s increasingly sophisticated nuclear and ballistic missile programmes.

The panel of experts said North Korea’s blockade aimed at preventing Covid-19 resulted in “historically low levels” of people and goods entering and leaving the country. Legal and illegal trade including in luxury goods “has largely ceased” though cross-border rail traffic resumed in early January, it said.

The panel has previously made clear that North Korea remains able to evade sanctions and to illicitly import refined petroleum, access international banking channels and carry out “malicious cyber activities”.

UN sanctions ban North Korean coal exports and the experts said in the new report that although coal exports by sea increased in the second half of 2021, “they were still at relatively low levels”.

“The quantity of illicit imports of refined petroleum increased sharply in the same period, but at a much lower level than in previous years,” the panel said, adding that direct deliveries by non-North Korean tankers has ceased and only tankers from the North delivered oil, “a marked change of methodology” probably in response to Covid-19 measures.

The experts said North Korea also continued to evade maritime sanctions “by deliberately obfuscated financial and ownership networks”.

While the humanitarian situation in the country continues to worsen, the panel said the almost complete lack of information from the country made it difficult to determine the “unintended humanitarian consequences of UN sanctions affecting the civilian population”.

HEADLINE	02/06 US: Russia 70% military in place to invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/06/ukraine-crisis-russia-has-in-place-70-of-military-needed-for-full-invasion-us-officials
GIST	<p>Russia has assembled at least 70% of the military firepower it intends to have in place by the middle of February to give President Vladimir Putin the option of launching a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, US officials have said.</p> <p>On Saturday, officials warned that a full Russian invasion could lead to the quick capture of Kyiv and potentially result in as many as 50,000 civilians killed or wounded, according to the New York Times and Washington Post. A US official confirmed that estimate to the Associated Press but it is not clear how US agencies determined those numbers.</p> <p>The grim assessment comes after British prime minister Boris Johnson agreed with French president Emmanuel Macron that the UK and its Nato allies would be united in their fight against Russian aggression “wherever and however it might occur”.</p> <p>European leaders are due to travel to both Moscow and Kyiv in a bid to calm tensions.</p> <p>Macron is expected to visit Moscow on Monday and Kyiv on Tuesday, while the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, will travel to Kyiv on 14 February and to Moscow the next day.</p> <p>UK foreign secretary Liz Truss had been due to travel to Ukraine with the prime minister on Tuesday but had to drop out of the trip after testing positive for coronavirus. Truss will reportedly travel to Moscow soon.</p> <p>US officials said that, as of Friday, the Russian army had put in place near Ukraine a total of 83 “battalion tactical groups”, each of which is roughly equivalent in size to an American battalion of between 750 and 1,000 soldiers. That is an increase from 60 battalion tactical groups in position just two weeks ago, they said.</p> <p>Another 14 battalion tactical groups are on their way to the border area from other parts of Russia, the officials said. Two officials said the US assesses that Russia would want a total of between 110 and 130 battalion tactical groups for use in a full-scale invasion, but Putin could decide on a more limited incursion. Including support units, Russia might be aiming to have 150,000 troops in place for a full-scale invasion, one official said, adding that the ongoing buildup could reach that level in the next couple of weeks.</p> <p>On Thursday, US officials claimed to have evidence of an elaborate plot by the Kremlin to make a “very graphic” fake video of a Ukrainian attack as a pretext for a military invasion. Downing Street said on Friday it has “high confidence” Russia is planning to fabricate a reason for attacking Ukraine.</p> <p>The US officials, who discussed internal assessments of the Russian buildup on condition they not be identified, sketched out a series of indicators suggesting Putin intends an invasion in coming weeks, although the size and scale are unclear. They stressed that a diplomatic solution appears to remain possible.</p> <p>Among those military indicators: an exercise of Russia’s strategic nuclear forces that usually is held in autumn was rescheduled for mid-February to March. That coincides with what US officials see as the most likely window for invasion. The officials made no suggestion that a prospective conflict would involve the use of nuclear weapons, but the Russian exercise – likely involving the test-launching of unarmed long-range missiles on Russian territory – could be used as a message aimed at deterring the west from intervening in Ukraine.</p> <p>US officials have said in recent weeks that a Russian invasion could overwhelm Ukraine’s military relatively quickly, although Moscow might find it difficult to sustain an occupation and cope with a potential insurgency.</p>

The ongoing Russian buildup comes as the Biden administration has been disclosing intelligence in hopes of pre-emptively countering Russian disinformation and blocking Putin's plans to create a pretext for an invasion. But it has come under criticism for not providing evidence to back up many of its claims.

Army officials on Saturday announced that Major General Christopher Donahue, the commanding general of the 82nd Airborne Division, arrived in Poland. About other 1,700 soldiers from the 82nd Airborne are deploying to Poland from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and 300 soldiers are deploying from Bragg to Germany. In addition, 1,000 Germany-based soldiers are shifting to Romania.

Captain Matt Visser, spokesman for the 18th Airborne Corps, which includes the 82nd division, said: "Our corps' presence serves to bolster existing US forces in Europe and demonstrates our commitment to our Nato allies and partners."

The corps was made up of "combat capable forces who stand ready to enhance the alliance's ability to deter and defeat Russian aggression", the US statement added.

Washington said last week it would send about 3,000 additional troops to eastern Europe to defend Nato members against any "aggression".

With growing nervousness in Eastern Europe over Russia's buildup, much attention is focused on its placement of thousands of troops in Belarus, which shares a border not only with Ukraine but also with three Nato nations: Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. The Biden administration may soon shift some more troops within Europe to allied nations on Nato's eastern flank, a US official said on Saturday without specifying which nations.

Defence secretary Lloyd Austin said last week that Putin could use any portion of the force he has assembled along Ukraine's borders to seize Ukrainian cities and "significant territories" or to carry out "coercive acts or provocative political acts" such as the recognition of breakaway territories inside Ukraine.

Depending on Putin's ultimate objective, the Russian forces could attack Kyiv directly by moving south from current positions in southern Belarus. He might also send forces across the Russian border into eastern and southern Ukraine if his intent is to fracture and destroy a large portion of the Ukrainian army, the officials said.

On the lower end of the scale of military action, Putin might order sabotage, cyberattacks and other destabilising actions inside Ukraine with the goal of removing the current government in Kyiv, officials have said.

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HEADLINE	02/04 Logistics hiring surge outlast busy holidays
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/logistics-hiring-surge-outlasts-holiday-busy-season-11643997477?mod=hp_minor_pos13
GIST	<p>Logistics companies ramped up hiring in January, in a sign that the sector's push to add workers is extending beyond the busy year-end season.</p> <p>Trucking, parcel-delivery and warehousing companies added a combined 42,100 jobs in January, according to seasonally adjusted preliminary employment data the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics released Friday, as strong pandemic-driven demand and shifting consumer buying patterns led to greater reliance on logistics services.</p> <p>The January figures show companies that stepped up hiring for the holidays held on to those seasonal workers in a tight U.S. labor market, said Nick Bunker, an economist at job-search platform Indeed.</p>

“Employers are having a harder time than they used to adding new workers,” so it makes sense to keep existing ones, he said.

January hiring is often more muted for logistics companies as seasonal workers are let go, industry experts said. This year’s payrolls were bolstered in part by the need for more people to handle delayed holiday merchandise arriving at clogged U.S. ports, as well as a large volume of post-holiday returns, said Cathy Roberson, head of research and consulting firm Logistics Trends & Insights LLC.

Retailers “started getting a good bit of this inventory towards the end of the quarter, which really helped extend the holiday season into January,” she said.

The pace of hiring in the overall U.S. economy quickened in January with the addition of 467,000 jobs following the upwardly revised 510,000 growth in payrolls in December.

The logistics market’s strong January figures come after the Omicron variant of Covid-19, which largely missed the previous jobs report, spread across the country, triggering widespread worker absences that affected operations including airfreight handling and container shipping.

The strongest growth in logistics hiring came in parcel operations, where companies that deliver packages to homes and businesses added 21,200 jobs in January after payrolls ticked down on a seasonally adjusted basis in December.

Warehousing and storage employment rose by 13,400 jobs last month, lifted by the continuing boom in construction of distribution centers driven by e-commerce demand. Warehousing companies have added more than 150,000 jobs over the past 12 months, according to BLS data.

The trucking sector added 7,500 jobs in January, lifting employment in that category by 2.5% from its pre-pandemic January 2020 level amid elevated freight demand.

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HEADLINE	02/04 In face of omicron, job growth robust gains
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/january-jobs-report-unemployment-rate-2022-11643924453?mod=hp_major_pos1#cxrecs_s
GIST	<p>U.S. employers hired at a rapid pace late last year and in January, bolstering the economy in the face of the Omicron wave of Covid-19 and staffing shortages.</p> <p>The U.S. economy added 467,000 jobs in January, the Labor Department said Friday. Job growth in November and December combined was about 700,000 higher than previously reported. Overall, the robust job gains this winter signal that hiring demand continued to be high as Delta and Omicron cases surged.</p> <p>“We’re seeing a more resilient, more prepared U.S. labor market than we’ve seen in the past,” said Becky Frankiewicz, president of ManpowerGroup North America.</p> <p>U.S. stocks moved higher and government bond yields climbed sharply after the better-than-expected jobs report.</p> <p>January payrolls might have been stronger if not for the surge in Omicron cases. The Labor Department said nearly two million workers were prevented from looking for a job last month because of the pandemic. And the number of Americans who said they were unable to work because their employer closed or lost business due to the pandemic nearly doubled in January from December.</p> <p>The unemployment rate rose slightly in January to 4% from 3.9% in December, with more people joining the workforce. Historically low joblessness is helping spur wage growth. Wages climbed 5.7% in January from a year earlier, nearly double the average of about 3% before the pandemic hit.</p>

The combination of low unemployment and strong wage growth [is expected to keep the Federal Reserve on track](#) to start lifting interest rates from near zero at its policy meeting next month. Policy makers see an urgent need to bring down inflation that recently hit [its highest level in nearly four decades](#).

Workers have more incentive to return to the labor market than they did a year ago due to the prospect for a bigger paycheck, a rundown in pandemic savings and an improving health situation. The labor-force participation rate, or the share of the population working or seeking a job, rose to 62.2% last month, the highest level since the pandemic hit in early 2020. The Labor Department attributed the increase to the introduction of new population estimates with January's data.

Employers added 6.67 million jobs last year, or just over 200,000 more positions than previously reported for 2021, according to annual revisions released in Friday's report.

Those revisions, conducted each January, included changes in how the Labor Department estimates seasonal employment patterns to capture pattern changes due to the pandemic. The revisions included downward adjustments last summer, which were offset by revised gains later in the year.

Auto manufacturers shed jobs last month. Most other sectors fared better, including Covid-sensitive ones such as leisure and hospitality that had pulled back hiring during previous surges in infections. Companies in some industries that typically rein in hiring after the holiday season, such as retail and transportation and warehousing, added to payrolls in January.

[H&R Block](#) Inc., a tax-preparation company, is in hiring mode, as tax season gets under way.

"Everyone has got to get their taxes done," said Tiffany Monroe, H&R Block's chief people and culture officer.

The company has been able to retain tax professionals, such as certified accountants and tax advisers, from previous years because they have close relationships with their clients, Ms. Monroe said. But H&R Block is finding it more challenging to retain and hire entry-level receptionists to greet clients and take calls across its offices.

"We're definitely going after the same people that a lot of the other retailers are going after," said Ms. Monroe. H&R Block is emphasizing to receptionists that they can advance into a leadership position or a tax-professional job, she added.

There are roughly 60 unemployed people for every 100 job openings, meaning just about anyone who wants a job can find one. Still, workforce participation remains below pre-pandemic levels. As a result, many companies are raising pay as they compete for labor.

Wages grew briskly in January from December in some higher-wage industries including professional and business services. Meanwhile, pay in leisure and hospitality—which has surged 13% over the past year—logged softer growth than other sectors in January compared with a month earlier.

Omicron still affected parts of the job market in January. The variant sent millions of sick workers into quarantine, [exacerbating labor shortages](#) at restaurants, airlines and public-transit systems. About 3.6 million Americans were employed but absent from work due to illness in January, up from two million in January 2021 and 1.1 million in January 2020.

Employee absences are adding to companies' pandemic-related challenges, including roiled supply chains. Being a plant manager is the toughest job at paint supplier [PPG Industries](#), Chief Executive Michael McGarry said in a fourth-quarter earnings call last month.

	<p>“They wake up in the morning, check their phone to see how many people call off sick, and then they get to work,” he said. “Before they even have a morning meeting, they’ve had to overcome a number of issues.”</p> <p>Those include dealing with delays in the receipt of raw materials and other supply-chain disruptions, such as truckers not picking up finished products, Mr. McGarry said.</p> <p>Economists expect labor-supply constraints to gradually ease this year as factors that held back job searches—including child-care disruptions, pent-up savings and fear of infection—abate.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/05 Israel, UAE draw closer on security, intel
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/israel-u-a-e-draw-closer-on-security-amid-threat-from-iran-its-allies-11644080194
GIST	<p>Israel and the United Arab Emirates are accelerating their security and intelligence cooperation efforts in the wake of a series of attacks on Abu Dhabi by Tehran-backed militants in Yemen that have triggered new concerns about the threat posed by Iran and its allies.</p> <p>One year after Israel and the U.A.E. signed a historic agreement to establish diplomatic ties for the first time, the two Middle East nations are discussing new ways to protect the Persian Gulf state, including the sale of advanced Israeli air-defense systems, according to people familiar with the matter.</p> <p>A deal would place Israeli military hardware right on Iran’s doorsteps, reshaping the security landscape in the Middle East, where Tehran and its allies have taken a more aggressive stance against their regional rivals in recent years. The Houthis have carried out hundreds of attacks against Saudi Arabia, while Iran-allied militias have targeted the U.S. in Iraq and threatened Israel from Syria and Lebanon.</p> <p>Tehran doesn’t want to see Israel secure a military foothold in the Persian Gulf area, and the government made its concerns clear to the U.A.E. earlier this week, when Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian told his Emirati counterpart in a call that Israel posed a threat to regional stability.</p> <p>“Efforts should be made to prevent initiators of tension from establishing a foothold in the region,” the Iranian foreign minister told U.A.E. Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan.</p> <p>Openly accepting Israeli military and intelligence support poses a conundrum for the U.A.E., which is looking to deepen ties with its new partner without antagonizing Tehran.</p> <p>The U.A.E. has privately welcomed the Israeli offers of military aid as it tries to counter a string of missile and drone attacks that have killed three people in recent weeks.</p> <p>It remains unclear if an agreement over installing Israeli air defenses in the U.A.E. is close. And Israel isn’t expected to offer the U.A.E. the crown jewel of its air defenses—its Iron Dome system. Israeli and Emirati authorities declined to comment.</p> <p>Cooperation between Israel and the U.A.E. has slowly blossomed since the two nations signed a historic, U.S.-backed agreement—known as the Abraham Accords—in August 2020 to establish official relations for the first time. Much of the focus until now was on tourism, business deals and trade.</p> <p>In November, Israeli and Emirati state-owned defense companies signed a deal to jointly develop drones designed to combat threats at sea.</p> <p>The threat posed by Iran was a catalyst for the Abraham Accords, which allow Israel and the U.A.E. to openly cooperate on security, particularly at a time when the U.S. and many in the region fear Tehran becoming a nuclear state should negotiations in Vienna fail.</p> <p>Israel is also moving swiftly to help Bahrain, the second Gulf nation to sign a deal in 2020 to normalize relations with Israel.</p>

On a surprise visit this week to Manama, Israel Defense Minister Benny Gantz signed a special security agreement with Bahrain that will pave the way for Israel to provide intelligence and military support to the island nation just 500 miles across the Persian Gulf from Iran.

During his visit, Mr. Gantz warned of the expanding threat from Iran and said Israel was prepared to do what it could to aid its new Gulf partners.

“We are willing to help, to take part in joint operational activities, in order to ensure stability and so that our friends can continue to exist and to prosper safely,” he said on Thursday. “And we will also be better protected from the different threats facing us.”

Joseph Votel, a retired U.S. general who once led the Defense Department Central Command responsible for the Middle East, said the U.S. should work with Israel and the Gulf nations to build a unified, regional defense system to protect all the countries from attacks by Iran and its militant allies.

“Iran is proving itself to be not just a threat to Israel, but to the entire region through its enabled proxy network,” said Mr. Votel, who now serves as a distinguished nonresident fellow at the Middle East Institute in Washington. “A strong, unified approach to addressing this threat, which is growing in frequency, would seem to be beneficial.”

A Jan. 17 attack by Houthi rebels on the U.A.E., which left three people dead, galvanized security cooperation between the two nations, say officials and analysts. Following that attack, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett sent a letter to Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, the de facto U.A.E. ruler, saying that Israel was committed to working closely with the Gulf nation against shared regional threats.

“We stand ready to offer you security and intelligence support in order to help you protect your citizens from similar attacks,” Mr. Bennett said in the letter.

Earlier this week, Houthis launched another attack on the U.A.E. while Israeli President Isaac Herzog was visiting Abu Dhabi to strengthen bilateral ties, though the Emirati military said the ballistic missile was intercepted. Israeli lawmaker Eli Cohen, who joined Mr. Herzog on the trip, said after the Houthi missile attack that the strike wouldn’t deter talks between Israel and the Emiratis.

Yoel Guzansky, a former member of Israel’s National Security Council and current senior research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies, said the U.A.E. had previously asked for air-defense support but its requests were turned down.

“They asked a few years ago but Israel refused up until now,” he said. “There is an indication that Bennett’s and Herzog’s visits to the U.A.E. might be the beginning of a change.”

Israel is unlikely to provide the Gulf nation with the Iron Dome system, said Mr. Guzansky, but could offer components like radar. The Iron Dome has proven effective in neutralizing rockets and drones fired from Hamas militants in Gaza. Israel sold an Iron Dome system to the U.S. Army, [which sent it to Guam for testing](#).

The U.A.E. currently uses the U.S.-built Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or Thaad, system, which helps protect against ballistic missiles. The U.S., which has its forces stationed at Al Dhafra Air Base in Abu Dhabi, is operating Patriot missile-defense systems that have been used to protect Abu Dhabi during recent attacks. Washington is also [sending advanced jet fighters and a U.S. warship](#) to work with the Emirati navy, and providing the U.A.E. with early-warning intelligence to identify Houthi launch sites.

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SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/dismal-russian-record-in-occupied-eastern-ukraine-serves-as-warning-11643988253?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos5
GIST	<p>STANYTSIA LUHANSKA, Ukraine—The Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine’s Luhansk and Donetsk regions were once the engines of the country’s economy and dominated its politics.</p> <p>They produced its richest man, billionaire industrialist Rinat Akhmetov, as well as former President Viktor Yanukovych, ousted by the street protests that triggered the Russian invasion in 2014.</p> <p>Since then, however, the two areas—now nominally independent “people’s republics” inside the larger regions of Luhansk and Donetsk—have turned into impoverished, depopulated enclaves that increasingly rely on Russian subsidies to survive. As much as half the prewar population of 3.8 million has left, for the rest of Ukraine, more prosperous Russia or Europe. Those who remain are disproportionately retirees, members of the security services and people simply too poor to move. Current economic output has shrunk to roughly 30% of the level before the Russian invasion, economists estimate.</p> <p>As Russian President Vladimir Putin is massing more than 100,000 troops for a possible broader invasion of Ukraine, the developments in Donetsk and Luhansk show what many fear could happen to the rest of the country if he were to carry that out. The dismal record of Russian rule is one reason so many Ukrainian citizens, including Russian-speakers, are ready to take up arms so that their hometowns won’t meet the same fate.</p> <p>“The nightmare that started in 2014 in Donetsk has transformed the popular attitudes in mostly Russian-speaking parts of Ukraine,” said Oleksiy Goncharenko, a lawmaker from Odessa, one of the cities in southern and eastern Ukraine rocked by large-scale pro-Russian protests at the time.</p> <p>“Back in 2014, the majority here were undecided—their main priority was to keep living normally, working in their businesses, sending their kids to school,” Mr. Goncharenko said. “Since then, they’ve seen very clearly that life is quiet only in the areas where the Ukrainian flag remains. They said: We don’t want to live in such a zombie zone, in some kind of Somalia.”</p> <p>Borys Korolyov, a native of Luhansk city, is now studying at a university in the northeastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, some 220 miles away. On a recent day, he lingered for a few minutes while his cellphone still worked in Stanytsia Luhanska, a crossing point from Ukrainian-controlled to Russian-held areas. Then he picked up his suitcase and headed across a bridge into Luhansk, to visit his parents.</p> <p>“In Kharkiv, there are new, unexpected things, opportunities at every corner,” said Mr. Korolyov. “In Luhansk, there is nothing to do except stay at home. Boring. No prospects for the future.”</p> <p>The Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics are among a number of breakaway statelets Russia has fostered on its periphery as it seeks to undermine pro-Western neighbors. Russian troops also occupy the self-proclaimed republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, and the Transnistria republic in Moldova. These territorial conflicts hamper the moves by Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova toward possible membership in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.</p> <p>When unrest began in eastern Ukraine following Mr. Yanukovych’s ouster and the Russian takeover of Crimea in February 2014, it was led by local pro-Russian militants with the tacit support of local law enforcement and some oligarchs. In April 2014, heavily armed Russian military veterans led by former Russian intelligence officer Igor Girkin seized the city of Slovyansk in the Donetsk region, heralding the start of more open Russian military involvement.</p> <p>Hastily formed Ukrainian volunteer battalions and the country’s then-dilapidated military responded with a bloody counteroffensive, retaking Slovyansk and a string of other rebel-held towns in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, an area collectively known as Donbas.</p>

When Ukrainian forces reached the outskirts of Donetsk and Luhansk cities in August 2014, Russia amped up its involvement, sending tanks, anti-aircraft batteries and long-range artillery across the border and imposing a cease-fire agreement on Kyiv.

Front lines have remained largely static since the latest Russian tank offensive in February 2015, even though sniper fire and artillery exchanges continue almost daily, with casualties on both sides.

Serhiy Shakun, known in Luhansk for his openly pro-Ukrainian opinions, operated one of the city's largest taxi companies, with a fleet of 200 vehicles before the Russian takeover. In 2014, pro-Russian gunmen came to his office looking to detain him. Warned by a phone call, he took his family and escaped, eventually settling in Severodonetsk, the government seat of the Kyiv-held part of the Luhansk region. "They have taken everything. Nothing is left," he said.

Many other businesses and institutions were similarly expropriated. Isolyatsiya used to be a popular contemporary art space in Donetsk, hosting exhibitions and performances at a Soviet-era insulation materials factory. When Russian-backed militants took it over in 2014, saying the space was needed to store Russian humanitarian aid, they allowed staff to rescue a collection of Soviet-period social-realist paintings but smashed the contemporary art pieces, melting some of the statues and installations for scrap metal.

The Russian-installed official in charge of the facility, Leonid Baranov, went on television at the time to say that degenerate art had to be destroyed because it ran counter to the values of the new state, prevented young families from procreating and promoted hatred of the Russian idea.

Weeks later, Isolyatsiya's compound turned into a detention facility operated by the Donetsk republic's ministry of state security. One of the hundreds of prisoners there was Ukrainian novelist and journalist Stanislav Aseev, who was detained in 2017 after local security officials discovered he was contributing under a pen name to Ukrainian news outlets. Mr. Aseev, who says he was repeatedly tortured with electric shock, was freed in December 2019 as part of a prisoner exchange and now lives near Kyiv.

"They've managed to rebuild a Soviet system in the occupied territories—and not the Soviet system of the 1960s and 1970s, but a Soviet system of the 1930s and 1940s, with dungeons, with torture chambers, a system where lives are ruined if you dare to write or say something negative about these republics and their authorities," Mr. Aseev said.

Russia still doesn't formally recognize the self-proclaimed independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics, something it has already granted to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. A bill to do so is making its way through the Russian parliament. Meanwhile, Russia has increasingly absorbed the two enclaves into its own economy.

The breakaway areas have switched from the Ukrainian currency to the Russian ruble; their citizens have been issued Russian passports; their students receive Russian diplomas; and the leaders of both republics last year publicly joined Mr. Putin's political party, United Russia. Mr. Putin recently ordered the extension of Russia's welfare benefits to the residents of the Donetsk and Luhansk republics.

"We see what Ukraine does to us: It shells and blockades Donbas, incites hatred of its residents. In this context, Russia's actions clearly demonstrate who really cares about the people and their legitimate rights, and who is only interested in gaining territory," the speaker of the Donetsk people's republic parliament, Vladimir Bidyovka, said as he thanked Mr. Putin for the move.

Donetsk, once one of Ukraine's wealthiest cities, hosted the 2012 European soccer championship with a new international airport, stadium and swanky hotels built for the event. Its buildings now are covered with billboards praising unity with Russia and honoring several separatist commanders who were mysteriously assassinated after 2014, [such as Givi, the leader of a battalion called Somalia](#).

With the Russian-occupied territories cut off from the international financial system and trade, Western brands' stores and chain restaurants have shut down. [McDonald's](#) outlets have rebranded as DonMac, offering fries and burgers in similar red packaging. Because of a curfew, most shops and restaurants close early. Property prices have plunged and transactions are difficult because of the legal limbo.

Little remains of the airport, the site of some of the war's most intense combat in 2014. Mobile network service is patchy and reliable connections with the rest of Ukraine are usually only possible via internet messaging services.

With the bulk of prominent Donbas businesspeople—including Mr. Akhmetov—escaping to Ukraine-controlled territory, the republics have seized most of the region's biggest mines and industrial enterprises. The most valuable ones now are controlled by Russian investor Yevgeni Yurchenko. In a recent interview with Donetsk TV channels, Mr. Yurchenko said he plans to raise salaries threefold by 2024, bringing them on par with the nearby Russian regions to stem the exodus of skilled workers.

Ukraine recognizes the residents of the occupied territories in Donetsk and Luhansk as its own citizens, and allows them to enter to renew their documents, obtain medical, mail and banking services unavailable in the breakaway republics—or resettle permanently if they so choose. Even residents who opt for Russian citizenship usually keep their Ukrainian passports, which allow visa-free entry to the European Union.

The crossings into Russian-occupied areas were relatively easy before the Covid-19 pandemic. Currently only the checkpoint at Stanytsia Luhanska, just across the river from Luhansk city, operates daily.

The crossing is usually open only to Luhansk residents, so Donetsk residents wishing to travel to and from the rest of Ukraine have to drive for over 24 hours, making a giant loop via Russia proper.

Only people registered as the occupied areas' permanent residents are allowed to enter without special permission. The Wall Street Journal was denied accreditation processing by the Luhansk people's republic, which required proof of residence in Russia to consider requests. The Donetsk people's republic didn't reply to an accreditation request.

On a recent afternoon, Larysa Kandakova, a native of Luhansk currently living in Kyiv, was spending her second day in a small service center at the Stanytsia Luhanska crossing point, waiting for permission from the Luhansk republic to enter to bury her mother, Livia. Aged 72, Ms. Kandakova's mother died of a heart attack earlier that week. "I am so afraid, I really want to be able to get across," she said, her eyes swollen. She was last able to see her mother two years ago.

Outside, coarse-voiced taxi and bus drivers touted rides to Kharkiv, Odessa and Severodonetsk to Luhansk residents who had just walked across the bridge separating Stanytsia Luhanska from Russian-held areas. The new bridge, running parallel to one destroyed in 2014, was built by Ukraine to be too narrow for tanks and heavy vehicles. A nurse in a booth just by the gate dispensed Pfizer -BioNTech Covid-19 vaccines, which are unauthorized in Russia and the breakaway republics. Some 3,000 people cross here daily.

Many were reluctant to discuss life in the Russian-controlled territory, casting a wary eye at potential informers in the crowd. "You have to keep your tongue between your teeth all the time because, otherwise, there will be trouble," said Oleksandr, a gold-toothed retired worker from the town of Stakhanov who crossed to visit his children and declined to provide his surname.

Andrey, who owns an ice-cream wholesaler in Luhansk and was crossing with his wife and child to visit relatives, said it was pointless for ordinary people like him to discuss politics. "Nothing depends on us. Let other people decide for us—the only thing we want is for the war to end," he said as his wife urged him to ignore "provocative" questions. "For many people, there's no reason to be nostalgic about Ukrainian rule," he said. "They had nothing back then, and they have nothing now. For them, nothing has changed."

While Ukraine has pumped money into jobs and infrastructure across the parts of Donbas it controls, Stanytsia Luhanska is hardly a showcase of prosperity. Frequent shelling by pro-Russian forces has

created streetscapes of collapsed roofs and pockmarked walls. Outside the cluster of outlets by the border checkpoints—a grocery, a kebab restaurant, a pharmacy and a Covid testing clinic—few businesses operate.

Development is much more visible in Slovyansk, which is well outside artillery range. New espresso bars, restaurants and hotels have opened throughout the city, as have retail outlets. Many of them are owned by newcomers from Russian-controlled parts of Donbas. Anastasia Monda, a 26-year-old from the town of Shakhtarsk near Donetsk, has worked as a barista in one such coffee shop for the past three years and travels to the occupied areas to visit her mother twice a year.

“My hometown is gloomy. But in Donetsk city, everything looks fine, except that few people remain,” she said. Like many people in Ukrainian-controlled Donbas, Ms. Monda wouldn’t be drawn into talking about a possible Russian invasion. “I am not a political person,” she said. “The less you know, the sounder you sleep.”

Unlike in the wars of the former Yugoslavia, where religion and ethnicity created a permanent identity marker, here whether to consider oneself Ukrainian or Russian is a matter of choice and ideology rather than blood.

“There are so many families here that have broken up because one part supported Ukraine and another backed the Russian aggression,” said Maryna Oliynyk, head of the culture department at the Slovyansk civil-military administration. She no longer speaks to her uncle and cousin, who live in a nearby Ukrainian-controlled town, binge on Russian TV and adore Mr. Putin. “I am a patriot,” she said.

At the Slovyansk local museum, a room is dedicated to the 84 days when the town remained under the control of Russian militias in 2014. Exhibits include rocket-propelled grenades, artillery fragments and ballots of the referendum on independence from Ukraine that pro-Russian forces carried out at the time. Some 100 local residents died in Slovyansk, and more than 2,000 buildings were destroyed or damaged in the fighting. A suburb along the main highway still stands in ruins.

“It’s a big stress. Everyone is afraid, God forbid, that it will happen again,” said one of the museum’s curators, Oleksandr Gayevoy, who lived through the fighting in 2014. “People now prefer not to talk too much, because who knows who will come here next.”

Mr. Gayevoy added that one of his brothers, who remained in the Russian-controlled town of Yenakiyevo, former President Yanukovich’s hometown, was an ardent supporter of the Russian-installed regime there but has since changed his views.

“There used to be a lot of enthusiasm for the Donetsk people’s republic in the beginning, everyone chanted DPR, DPR, DPR! Now, there’s just a lot of disappointment,” said Mr. Gayevoy, who last visited the Russian-held areas in 2019. “My brother now tells me that they are ruled by cretins. The economy there has crumbled, the jobs are gone. There’s nothing good over there.”

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HEADLINE	02/05 Opening of Olympics 43% lower US viewers
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/beijing-winter-olympics-opening-day-draws-about-16-million-u-s-viewers-43-lower-than-in-2018-11644116908?mod=hp_lista_pos2
GIST	<p>The opening day of the Winter Olympics in Beijing drew nearly 16 million viewers in the U.S. on Friday across NBC’s TV and streaming platforms, a roughly 43% drop from the kickoff for the Games in Pyeongchang in 2018, according to preliminary figures from the network.</p> <p>The opening ceremony aired twice on Friday—live in the morning and again in prime time, on both NBC and streaming service Peacock. Beijing is 13 hours ahead of the U.S. East Coast. NBC’s viewership ratings, which includes figures from Nielsen and Adobe Analytics, cover all of the TV broadcasts and streaming.</p>

A spokesman for NBC parent NBCUniversal, a unit of Comcast Corp. CMCSA -0.62% , said nearly 15 million of those viewers watched the opening ceremony. The opening day featured other events beyond the opening ceremony, including the mixed curling round robin and figure skating mixed-team qualification rounds.

One of the notable moments of the opening ceremony was the choice of Dinigeer Yilamujiang, a 20-year-old female cross-country skier from China's northwestern region of Xinjiang, as one of the country's two athletes to light the Olympic flame. Her selection came as a reminder to the geopolitical issues looming over the Olympics.

The U.S. and other countries, including Australia, Canada, the U.K., and Japan [have decided not to send official delegations of dignitaries](#). The countries have cited human-right abuses in China as their reasoning, which includes a yearslong campaign of forcible assimilation that has included the detention of as many as one million mostly Muslim minorities in internment camps in Xinjiang.

Viewership for Olympic opening ceremonies has been falling. The kickoff for the Tokyo Summer Olympics in July [attracted roughly 17 million U.S. viewers](#). That had been a roughly 36% drop from the Summer Games in Rio de Janeiro in 2016.

While opening ceremony viewership may not necessarily reflect the audience of the entire Games, the Olympics have garnered smaller audiences in recent cycles. The Tokyo Olympics [drew the lowest audience for the Summer Games](#) since NBC started broadcasting them in 1988. NBC had said it expected a drop in viewership because of the challenges posed by the pandemic, as some athletes were unable to participate and spectators weren't allowed in the stands.

The Beijing Olympics will have few spectators, and due to [China's strict Covid-testing regime](#), NBC decided to keep its announcing team in its U.S. facilities.

"We said Tokyo was going to be one of the most challenging Olympics of our lifetime. I retract that. Beijing is unique in this regard," said Molly Solomon, NBC's executive producer and president of Olympics coverage, during a company presentation in January.

For the first time ever, the entirety of the Olympics will be available to cord-cutters through Peacock. NBC [is looking to avoid disappointing any consumers](#) without pay-TV subscriptions or an antenna looking to watch the Winter Games solely from the streaming platform.

Peacock had its "best-ever weekday viewership" on Friday, and total digital usage—including other NBC platforms—amassed 190 million minutes, NBCUniversal said, adding this was the largest digital consumption ever for an opening ceremony.

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HEADLINE	02/05 Russia military buildup near Ukraine grows
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-military-buildup-near-ukraine-grows-heightening-u-s-concern-11644114047?mod=hp_lead_pos3
GIST	<p>A series of Russian military moves and potential political steps has heightened concern within the Biden administration that Moscow could launch a major military attack in Ukraine within weeks, U.S. officials said.</p> <p>Russia currently has 83 battalion tactical groups poised near the country, a substantial increase from the 53 groups it had in December and 60 last month, according to officials familiar with U.S. intelligence assessments.</p>

Should Russia continue adding to its forces and then mount an all-out attack to try to take over the entire country, 25,000 to 50,000 civilians would be killed or wounded, the intelligence assessments project. The extent of the toll would depend on how much fighting there would be in urban areas.

Between 3,000 and 10,000 Russian troops and between 5,000 and 25,000 Ukrainian troops would be killed or wounded, according to the assessments. One million to five million Ukrainians would be displaced, the assessments said.

The growing Russian military buildup comes as diplomatic efforts to defuse the dispute over Ukraine have failed to narrow the sharp disagreement between the two sides. In addition, the Kremlin appears to be laying the political foundation for potential military action, according to U.S. analysts.

On Friday, Russian President Vladimir Putin cemented during a meeting in Beijing his growing partnership with Chinese leader Xi Jinping to challenge the U.S.

A proposal by some Russian legislators to recognize the independence of the Donbas region in Ukraine could come up for consideration as early as Feb. 14, according to some Russian media. U.S. officials have been closely monitoring that development and worry that the Kremlin could use such a move as political cover for intervening further into Ukraine.

Russia already provides military support to separatists in the Donbas areas and annexed the Crimea peninsula in 2014.

“They are putting into place the military capabilities they would need if they wanted to conduct a large-scale invasion,” said Rob Lee, a former Marine infantry officer who studies the Russian military. “The forces they are putting into Belarus and their naval exercises appear intended to deter NATO involvement.”

While the U.S. and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies have said they don’t plan to fight in Ukraine, the U.S., Britain and other NATO nations have been sending arms to Kyiv and are conducting training missions there.

With tensions rising, the first of 3,000 U.S. troops that are being deployed to strengthen the eastern flank of NATO allies arrived Saturday in Poland. The U.S. Army’s XVIII Corps is setting up a task-force headquarters in Germany while an Army Stryker unit is being sent to Romania.

Russia has said that it doesn’t plan to invade Ukraine and insists that its units have been sent to Belarus for an exercise. Mr. Putin said in December that Moscow is prepared to take “retaliatory military-technical measures” if the West continues what he called its “aggressive line.”

Russia has moved the majority of its special-forces units close to Ukraine, according to U.S. officials. The Russian Defense Ministry said Saturday that it has moved Su-25 attack planes to Belarus, expanding Moscow’s air power in the region.

The Conflict Intelligence Team, a group of Russian bloggers that monitors Russian military activity, reported in recent days that a Russian National Guard unit is positioned near Ukraine and that National Guard units have been seen leaving Chechnya.

Those National Guard units could be used to occupy Ukrainian territory after it was seized by Russian combat forces and to prevent civilians from observing the final preparations on Russian territory for an attack, analysts said.

In the Black Sea, amphibious ships, which could carry hundreds of Russian troops, are moving closer to Ukraine, the U.S. officials said.

The total number of Russian troops is in excess of 100,000. Each battalion tactical group has about 800 soldiers. The remainder of the force includes logistics, medical, aviation and headquarters units.

U.S. officials said they don't know if Mr. Putin has made a final decision to attack. The Russian military buildup, which now brackets Ukraine from the north, east and south, gives the Kremlin a range of options.

They include sending more troops into Donbas in southeastern Ukraine and carrying out sequential or simultaneous attacks from the north and south. President Biden said in January that Russia might opt for a "minor incursion." The worst-case scenario would be an attack on Ukraine's capital—a possibility Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky has largely dismissed as an exaggerated fear by anxious Western partners.

Forces in Belarus could make a thrust south on both sides on the Dnieper River, which divides the city of Kyiv, said William Courtney, a former U.S. ambassador to Kazakhstan who is an adjunct senior fellow at Rand Corp. in Washington. "Being able to approach on both sides would enable Russia to more quickly encircle and seize control of the capital than approaching from the east," Mr. Courtney said.

To carry out a full-scale invasion and occupation of the entire country, Russia would need still more forces, according to the assessments of U.S. officials. The deployments to date provide it with 70% of what it would need for such a scenario, and those additional forces could be marshaled in a matter of weeks, U.S. officials said.

With its current level of forces, there is an array of military options that Russia's forces could pursue, including seizing swaths of territory and defending breakaway republics.

The latest intelligence, which the Biden administration has shared with Congress, comes as Mr. Zelensky and the Pentagon have differed over the urgency of the Russian military threat to Ukraine.

Mr. Zelensky and his top security advisers have said the main danger is Moscow's effort to destabilize the country, not an all-out Russian attack, and they want to avoid frightening the public and disrupting the economy.

"Russia's main concern might not be NATO expansion but Ukraine becoming such a strong democracy that it could be accepted by the West," Mr. Courtney said. "And that could add momentum to a move westward by Belarus."

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HEADLINE	02/05 Minneapolis: thousands protest shooting
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2022/02/05/thousands-protest-police-shooting-Amir-Locke-Minneapolis/3411644120130/
GIST	<p>Feb. 5 (UPI) -- Thousands gathered in freezing downtown Minneapolis Saturday to protest against the killing of Amir Locke, the 22-year-old Black man shot by police earlier this week.</p> <p>Locke's death exacerbated existing wounds in the city, where George Floyd was murdered by a police officer less than two years ago.</p> <p>"I don't know what today will bring," one protestor, Jeanelle Austin, told the New York Times during a demonstration that remained peaceful. "But we need something different. We can't keep continuing with more of the same. We're dying."</p> <p>Protestors called on Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey and Interim Chief Amelia Huffman to resign, according to reports from WCCO Minnesota. They also called on city leadership to immediately fire and prosecute Minneapolis Police Officer Mark Hanneman, who fatally shot Locke during an early morning SWAT raid on an apartment complex while carrying out a no-knock search warrant.</p>

Locke was not named on the warrant, nor was he a resident of the apartment. He was sleeping on the couch when police arrived.

A graphic body camera [video](#) released by the MPD Thursday shows police quietly unlocking the door of the apartment. They enter and yell "Police! Search warrant!" One officer kicked the back of the couch where was Locke hiding under a blanket, which jostled Locke and revealed a gun.

Police shot at least three times in response. Locke died of multiple gunshot wounds, [according to the Hennepin County Medical Examiner](#). The entire incident lasted less than one minute.

The raid was part of an ongoing murder investigation by St. Paul police. Hennepin County Attorney Mike Freeman [said Friday](#) that he and Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison are reviewing the video footage and that criminal charges against the involved officers are possible.

Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minn., is among the people taking Frey to task for campaigning on the promise to end no-knock raids.

"Once again we're left only with the empty words of police and the Mayor. Words that, at best, are meant to mislead the people of Minneapolis, and at worst are quite simply lies aimed at portraying Amir as a criminal," [Omar wrote in a series of tweets](#) on Friday.

"We are also more than a year into a Department of Justice investigation into the patterns and practices of the MPD after the murder of George Floyd. It's tragic that before that investigation is complete, we are facing another murder that would warrant its own."

Saturday's protest took place against the backdrop of an ongoing federal trial against the three former MPD officers who stood by as their superior officer, Derek Chauvin, knelt on Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes. [Chauvin was convicted of Floyd's murder in April](#).

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HEADLINE	02/06 Olympic teams concerns: quarantine hotels
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/sports/olympics/olympic-teams-raise-concerns-over-quarantine-hotels/
GIST	<p>BEIJING (AP) — Not enough food. Inedible meals. No training equipment. Some Olympic athletes unlucky enough to test positive for the coronavirus at the Beijing Olympics feel their quarantine conditions are making a bad situation much worse.</p> <p>“My stomach hurts, I’m very pale and I have huge black circles around my eyes. I want all this to end. I cry every day. I’m very tired,” Russian biathlon competitor Valeria Vasnetsova posted on Instagram from one of Beijing’s so-called quarantine hotels.</p> <p>Her problem wasn’t with any symptoms of the virus. It was the food.</p> <p>Vasnetsova posted a picture Thursday of what she said was “breakfast, lunch and dinner for five days already” — a tray with food including plain pasta, an orange sauce, charred meat on a bone, a few potatoes and no greens.</p> <p>She said she mostly survived on a few pieces of pasta because it was “impossible” to eat the rest, “but today I ate all the fat they serve instead of meat because I was very hungry.” She added she lost a lot of weight and “my bones are already sticking out.”</p> <p>The quarantine hotels are increasingly the target of criticism from athletes and their teams, who are lobbying organizers for improvements. There’s a lack of transparency, too, with only some virus-positive athletes forced into quarantine hotels where their teams don’t have access, while teammates in similar situations are allowed to isolate within the Olympic village.</p>

The rules for athletes who test positive say those without symptoms go to a dedicated hotel for isolation. Anyone who has COVID-19 with symptoms will go to a hospital. In both cases, they'll be unable to compete until cleared for discharge.

Teams have started going public with criticism.

After Eric Frenzel, a three-time gold medalist in Nordic combined, tested positive, German delegation head Dirk Schimmelpfennig lambasted the "unreasonable" living conditions. Germany wants larger, more hygienic rooms, and more regular food deliveries so athletes who are eventually released are still fit to compete, Schimmelpfennig said in comments reported by the FAZ newspaper.

The pressure can pay off. Belgian skeleton racer Kim Meylemans was brought back from a quarantine hotel to isolation in the athletes' village after she made a tearful post on social media. Her main gripe was the lack of information. She was loaded into an ambulance and transported from one quarantine facility to another on a day she thought she was being released.

Vasnetsova passed her time in quarantine with a little detective work. When fetching the food left outside her door, she took a glance at the boxes left outside other rooms in her corridor, whose doors were labeled with signs to distinguish Olympians from other people working at the Games who tested positive, such as team staff.

She concluded the athletes were getting worse food, and underlined it with a picture of food served to her team doctor, who had also tested positive and was living two floors below. He had fresh fruit, a salad and prawns with broccoli.

"I honestly don't understand, why is there this attitude to us, the athletes?!" she wrote.

Two days on from her criticism, Vasnetsova is still in quarantine but things are looking up.

Russian biathlon team spokesperson Sergei Averyanov posted a picture of what he said was an improved meal delivered to Vasnetsova's room including salmon, cucumbers, sausages and yogurt. A stationary bike will be delivered soon, he added.

Vasnetsova, he wrote, "is already smiling, and that's the main thing."

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HEADLINE	02/05 Survivors Oregon wildfire: health problems
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/northwest/2020-wildfire-survivors-report-health-problems-housing-woes/
GIST	<p>SALEM, Ore. — Survivors of the 2020 Labor Day wildfires in Santiam Canyon cities reported breathing problems, health problems and struggles to find housing still impacted them a year after the fires, according to an Oregon State University community health study.</p> <p>Of the more than 100 residents of cities including Detroit, Gates, Lyons, Mill City and Idanha who participated in the survey, 55% reported having some or a lot of difficulty breathing, compared with 27% who reported they had breathing problems before the fires. The survey was conducted from October to November.</p> <p>Respondents to the survey reported they were still changing air filters in their houses every two weeks and that both they and their animals continue to experience health issues due to contamination from the fires, the (Salem) Statesman Journal reported.</p> <p>Oregon State professor Marc Braverman, one of the authors of the study, said the burning of buildings, machinery and other materials typically releases potentially toxic chemicals in the air.</p>

“In addition, the fire’s destruction of trees and removal of forest cover, and its effects on soil in the region, can create atypically high levels of dust that might still be at elevated levels in the air, depending on wind patterns, which might still be affecting residents,” Braverman said.

The assessment looked at the ongoing physical and mental health of survivors in the Santiam Canyon, including environmental health, housing and access to healthy food.

The study, funded through a grant from Marion County, also found that 13% of those who lost homes in the wildfires had returned to the area.

And as of Nov. 15, 42% of them (301 of 694) had been issued building permits and 53% had been issued septic permits.

The inability of wildfire survivors to find housing has caused problems like trauma, depression, chronic stress and anxiety. It also has brought on other problems for survivors by impacting physical health through their diet, inability to exercise, reduced access to medical care and increased exposure to the weather.

“There’s a ton of residents who are still experiencing these problems and are displaced,” Braverman said. “The housing problems is kind of at the root of a lot of the various health problems, especially mental health, stress and anxiety.”

The study found many displaced people are living in places like Portland and Salem, but still consider themselves Santiam Canyon residents.

One of the recommendations, according to the study, is for governments to make it easier for residents to rebuild their homes, such as streamlining the process for getting permits.

“As far as the county is concerned, that health assessment confirmed what we knew, that we needed housing,” Marion County Commissioner Kevin Cameron said. “It’s just confirmed that we’ve got work to do and we’re continuing to do that.”

The recommendations made in the study include addressing the shortage of mental health providers in the area, increasing the attention paid to food insecurity, supporting survivors’ efforts to rebuild, establishing a health registry, evaluating dust mitigation needs and sampling ash and dust for toxic chemicals.

Water quality also was a major concern.

Detroit’s water filtration was destroyed in the fires, and it took seven months for a temporary one to be put in place and water to begin flowing to the city again. The city also has had to replace contaminated lines.

Some residents reported distrust in the quality of water, in part due to compounds like methyl tert-butyl ether. The levels found are considered safe in Oregon.

“There was a fair amount of distrust,” Braverman said. “People just didn’t believe the reports or whatever agencies are doing the measuring. This isn’t true of everybody, but many people just didn’t trust what they were hearing in terms of like what’s safe.”

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HEADLINE	02/05 Bad to worse to tragic: Vancouver shooting
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/bad-goes-to-worse-goes-to-tragic-sorting-out-details-in-rare-police-on-police-shooting-in-vancouver/
GIST	Clark County’s emergency radio recordings reveal the confusion that continued after a blast of rifle shots left an off-duty Vancouver police officer dead on the front porch of his home from bullets fired by a uniformed county sheriff’s deputy who mistook him for an armed robbery suspect .

“County has subject detained,” a dispatcher reported on the channel at 9:07 p.m. Jan. 30.

Then in the next sentence: “Subject was injured during a shooting. No law enforcement injured.”

Only after other sheriff’s deputies approached “the subject” at the front door of the home did they realize it was [Officer Donald Sahota](#) — not the [robbery suspect](#) who had been chased to the neighborhood after a minimart holdup miles away.

It likely will take weeks before a team of detectives sorts out key questions about what happened that night at Sahota’s rural home near the end of a private gravel road on the outskirts of Battle Ground:

What did the deputy who mistakenly killed the off-duty officer know when he arrived at the scene? Did he yell any commands before firing? If so, did Sahota respond? Did dispatchers get a physical description of Sahota and what he was wearing, and did they communicate any of that information to the deputies responding?

The questions are familiar to police trainers and law enforcement advisers who have studied the relatively rare instances of deadly police-on-police encounters across the country.

More than a decade ago, they recommended a set of national standards to reduce fatal outcomes, but none are in place, and most states, including Washington and Oregon, don’t provide the focused training. Perhaps that’s not altogether surprising, even the experts say, given that the shootings occur infrequently and have unique and often complicated sequences of events.

But enough similarities do exist — no clear markings that identify off-duty officers as police, guns in their hands and split-second reactions of the shooters — that confronting the issue could help prevent the next tragedy, said Geoffrey Alpert, a criminologist at the University of South Carolina who has researched high-risk police activities for more than three decades.

With officers from many different agencies working in one area and sometimes carrying guns off-duty, the potential for a mistaken-identity confrontation is enormous, Alpert and other specialists said. Training for officers on both sides of the equation holds promise to reduce these risky encounters, they said.

Alpert assisted a New York state task force in 2009 that examined fatal police-on-police shootings nationwide and produced what remains [the most comprehensive study](#) of its kind, with nine recommendations.

Beyond calling for national or state standards on when and how to take police action off-duty, the study also urged police agencies to provide dedicated, scenario-based training throughout an officer’s career, with on-duty officers going through shoot/don’t shoot encounters where they confront off-duty officers.

In Sahota’s shooting by [Clark County sheriff’s Deputy Jonathan Feller](#), much remains unknown.

It’s possible, Alpert said, that “the cop coming to the scene, all he sees is a man running with a gun toward the house, and probably is thinking, ‘If this guy is the bad guy running toward the house and you let him get in, what’s he going to do? I can’t let that happen.’”

And Sahota may have been singularly focused on trying to save the life of his wife in the house, said Keith Taylor, a retired New York police officer who did undercover narcotics work and is now an adjunct assistant professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City.

“It’s certainly a really awful set of circumstances where bad goes to worse goes to tragic,” Taylor said.

He also stressed: “We don’t know what the officers saw right before, what this individual perceived upon arriving on scene.”

“It’s going to be really important,” Taylor said, “to find out the rest of the story.”

Scene unfolded quickly

Deputies at the scene that night, a week ago Saturday, and investigators afterward have described the mayhem at the officer’s home in court documents and public statements this past week.

About 45 minutes earlier that Saturday, a man later identified as Julio Cesar Segura, 20, allegedly pointed a gun at a clerk working in a Chevron Food Mart in Orchards, a suburb of Vancouver, taking off with \$583, the clerk said. The robbery occurred around 8:15 p.m.

Segura took off in a dark blue Mercedes-Benz. Clark County deputies chased the stolen car north on Interstate 205. They flattened the car’s tires with spike strips as it exited Interstate 5 north toward Battle Ground. The suspect ditched the car and ran through the neighborhood.

Segura showed up at Sahota’s doorstep, claiming he had crashed his car and needed help, investigators said. Sahota’s wife, Dawnese, called 911.

The 911 call taker told her that deputies were looking for an armed robbery suspect in the area and that based on her location, “the presumption was the man at their door was probably the suspect,” according to Capt. Rich Fletcher, a spokesman for the Lower Columbia Major Crimes Team, which is investigating the shooting.

Sahota’s wife stayed on the 911 call and reported that her husband was an off-duty Vancouver police officer and had the suspect at gunpoint outside, according to an affidavit filed in court in support of Segura’s arrest.

It appears a dispatcher had at some point relayed those details to deputies on a radio channel because one who responded to the scene wrote in another affidavit: “Further information was that a resident of the location was a law enforcement officer, and he was holding the subject at gunpoint.”

But Sahota and Segura quickly began to fight in the driveway. A Portland police plane overhead and deputies operating an unmanned drone to track the suspect captured the scuffle on their video equipment, according to the affidavits. Deputies with aerial views radioed to their colleagues that the resident and suspect were fighting. A later review of the aerial videos showed a pistol fell to the ground during the struggle outside.

Segura stabbed the officer several times during the fight and ran into the home when he heard sirens, according to the court documents. Sahota stood up, grabbed his dropped pistol and ran after Segura, the aerial videos showed.

That’s when Feller, a Clark County deputy since 2018, arrived and “within seconds” fired his rifle, investigators said. They did not say where he was standing, whether he issued any commands or how many shots he fired. It’s not clear if he saw the fight. Another deputy who responded reported hearing two gunshots.

Other deputies ran up and challenged “the subject on the front porch,” according to the court filings. They believed that the downed man was the armed robbery suspect, investigators said.

Sahota’s wife had remained on the phone with 911. She had tried to lock the front door to stop Segura from getting inside, but he forced the door open, still armed with a knife, one of the affidavits noted. The door struck Dawnese Sahota in the forehead and knocked her to the ground. She was later treated at a hospital for her injuries.

As deputies moved closer to the front porch, Segura stuck his hands out the front door and came out, according to the court documents. He left a knife on a couch inside the house.

It was only then, as deputies arrested Segura and handcuffed him, that “law enforcement personnel realized the homeowner, an off-duty police officer, was the person who was shot,” an affidavit said.

Moments later, Segura told a Clark County sheriff’s deputy in a recorded statement that he had stolen a Mercedes from a dealer in Yakima, robbed a Chevron, crashed the car and ended up at the Battle Ground house. He said he had an airsoft pistol that fell out of his pocket when he ran from the crash.

He was wearing the same clothes he had on when he robbed the Chevron, Segura told deputies.

An alert sent over the sheriff’s radio channel had described the armed suspect as a white male with a dark complexion, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, a black undershirt and a white baseball hat with black bill, an affidavit said.

But Deputy James Lawrence, who was interviewing Segura, noted Segura wasn’t wearing the hat when arrested.

Investigators haven’t said what Sahota was wearing, if he left his house wearing a bulletproof vest or if dispatchers ever got his description and shared it with deputies.

Segura knew Sahota was a police officer, he told deputies. It’s not clear when or how he learned that.

“Accumulation of mistakes”

Police training academies in Washington and Oregon don’t specifically teach recruits or veteran officers how to handle encounters with off-duty officers. It’s typically folded into overall use-of-force or threat assessment training. The Clark County Sheriff’s Office also doesn’t provide any specific training on how to avoid friendly fire.

That might be because the number of police gunned down by fellow officers is so small, Alpert said.

The FBI keeps track of law enforcement [officers killed or assaulted in the line of duty](#) but it doesn’t identify mistaken-identity, police-on-police shooting deaths within a broader category of accidental deaths. From 2015-2019, nine police officers nationwide died in accidental gun-related incidents, according to the FBI.

Last year, 129 officers were killed — 73 in what the FBI calls “felonious deaths” and 56 in accidents. The accidents mostly stemmed from motor vehicle crashes or officers struck outside patrol cars. None of the accidental deaths were classified as gun-related, the FBI data says.

The New York state task force studied police-on-police shootings in the aftermath of two off-duty officers in the state killed by other police in 2008 and 2009.

The group examined 26 fatal friendly fire shootings that occurred across the country from 1981 through 2009 and found that 10 involved the killing of an off-duty officer. All of them had a gun out at the time, the study found.

“Our review of these incidents suggests that they are often the result of an accumulation of mistakes and misjudgments,” the report said. “Police recruits and veteran police officers alike can be trained to anticipate such confrontations and learn the appropriate responses for both the challenging and the confronted officers.”

The training mantra is: Officers shouldn’t shoot unless they know who they’re shooting unless there’s a threat of imminent injury or death, even if they believe an armed suspect is running toward an occupied house. The responding uniformed officer should shout commands, such as “Stop,” “Drop the gun!” or “Put your hands up!” before firing.

It's also critical for dispatchers to share the most accurate information with officers responding to a crime or chasing an armed suspect, according to William Geller, a former associate director of the Police Executive Research Forum, a police research nonprofit in Washington, D.C. Geller also helped advise the New York task force.

He suggested 911 operators have checklists to collect and convey the best physical descriptions possible of off-duty, plainclothes or undercover officers, as well as similarly accurate descriptions of criminal suspects.

Officers find it hard to stand back

Many of the training recommendations focus on what off-duty officers should and shouldn't do to avoid the encounters in the first place.

Officers are encouraged not to take enforcement action if they're out of uniform, unless someone's life or personal safety is at stake. They're urged to call 911 and instead serve as a good witness.

Yet that's particularly challenging for any officer.

"Police officers, as a general rule, get involved," the task force report said. "The training to serve as a witness rather than a hero when off-duty or in plainclothes is difficult to follow in practice. ... It is one thing to train a confronted officer to obey the commands of the challenging officer, but it is another thing altogether for the confronted officer to follow that training in the heat of the moment."

Police agencies have become more resistant over the years to having off-duty officers intervene "for the very reasons we see in this case," said Chuck Wexler, current executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum.

"At the end of the day, this is all about communication and identification," Wexler said, adding, "but that's not always easy."

The Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, which provides training on guns, driving, tactics and investigations, uses a three-word phrase to help off-duty officers remember what they need to do: "Prevent, Identify, Comply."

But if off-duty officers do take action, they or someone with them should call 911 or use a radio to alert local police and provide a physical description of what they look like, what they're wearing and note if they have a gun or other weapon. Dispatchers should share that information immediately with responding officers.

Off-duty officers should display their badge around their neck or on their waist but also should identify themselves with something that can be seen from all sides, such as a bright vest or jacket with distinct markings, the federal training center recommends. They should also identify themselves as police in a clear, confident manner, the center says.

They should follow all commands from uniformed officers and assume the commands are directed at them, the New York task force recommended. They must avoid doing a "reflexive spin" toward responding officers because that can be seen as a threat, particularly if they have a gun.

The task force found that many friendly shootings by police are exacerbated by racial biases. In the 15 years leading up to 2009, 10 of the 14 officers killed in mistaken-identity, police-on-police shootings were people of color.

In the Clark County case, there's no indication that race played a role in the shooting at this point.

Even the best training can't anticipate the variables of an unexpected and dangerous threat, policing experts said.

When Sahota was suddenly confronted at his home at night by a suspect reported to have a gun, he might not have had time to look around to grab the right gear before heading out of his home, said Taylor, the retired New York police officer.

After he was stabbed three times in the torso, Sahota may have become disoriented, Taylor said.

“It’s quite possible he was unaware police had arrived,” he said. “We don’t know if he was in an altered state of mind because of his injuries, feeling a lot of pain and anxiety about a bad guy possibly going into the house. He likely was focused on protecting his wife from harm.”

The Vancouver Police Department considers Sahota’s death a line-of-duty casualty because he was using his authority as an officer when he was shot and killed. It’s the first line-of-duty death in the department’s 138-year history.

Sahota started his police career in 1998 as a patrol officer for Gresham police. He also worked for the Port of Portland Police Department before joining Vancouver police in 2014. He worked as an armorer and most recently was assigned to the training unit.

A public funeral is planned Tuesday.

[Vancouver police Chief James McElvain](#) wiped away tears at a news conference last week and said the Clark County sheriff and deputies “are also hurting” from the circumstances of Sahota’s death.

The chief read a note from Sahota’s wife and children, who blamed only Segura for Sahota’s death. Segura faces allegations of first-degree attempted murder and robbery.

“While police officers are heroes, they’re also human,” the family statement said. “We hold no ill feelings toward the Clark County Sheriff’s Office or the deputy involved in this tragedy and hope others can show them grace as well.”

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HEADLINE	02/04 Seattle homes: high demand, low inventory
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/money/home-buying-seattle-high-demand-low-inventory-interest-rates/281-5bc5c3cf-d896-45d5-9fc2-a5aac0c6f0d7
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Many home buyers are rushing to secure deals ahead of expected interest rate hikes.</p> <p>“A lot of buyers are out here shopping and they know that the interest rates are going to rise so they’re just trying to hurry up and get locked in at a good rate,” said Ali Samael, a real estate agent with the Catalyst Group.</p> <p>He said homes are selling quickly.</p> <p>“With homes hitting the market right now we're finding that they don't even make it to the open house, so don't wait for the open house, just hurry up, go out there, see it, if you like it, place an offer, don't wait,” said Samael said.</p> <p>Properties are also selling above asking prices.</p> <p>“20%, 30%, in some cases 45% over asking, in Bellevue, Kirkland we are seeing it, considering the fact that there's nothing to choose from, you may have 20 or 30 buyers going after the same property,” said Max Rombakh, a managing broker with Windermere Real Estate.</p> <p>He said he recently helped sell a Bellevue home for nearly a million dollars over the asking price.</p>

	<p>“It was a very unique home in a unique neighborhood in Bridle Trails, five minutes to Bellevue, five minutes to Kirkland, five minutes to Redmond,” Rombakh said.</p> <p>That’s an exceptional case, he said, but an example of what is happening in the market.</p> <p>Rombakh said homebuyers should do as much lending preparation as they can before making an offer.</p> <p>“It’ll help you be more competitive,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/04 Omicron propels Covid death over 900,000
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/us-hits-covid-deaths-milestone-coronavirus-omicron-76dc452fb7263612529e09eb23bc0f24
GIST	<p>Propelled in part by the wildly contagious omicron variant, the U.S. death toll from COVID-19 hit 900,000 on Friday, less than two months after eclipsing 800,000.</p> <p>The two-year total, as compiled by Johns Hopkins University, is greater than the population of Indianapolis, San Francisco, or Charlotte, North Carolina.</p> <p>The milestone comes more than 13 months into a vaccination drive that has been beset by misinformation and political and legal strife, though the shots have proved safe and highly effective at preventing serious illness and death.</p> <p>“It is an astronomically high number. If you had told most Americans two years ago as this pandemic was getting going that 900,000 Americans would die over the next few years, I think most people would not have believed it,” said Dr. Ashish K. Jha, dean of the Brown University School of Public Health.</p> <p>He lamented that most of the deaths happened after the vaccine gained authorization.</p> <p>“We got the medical science right. We failed on the social science. We failed on how to help people get vaccinated, to combat disinformation, to not politicize this,” Jha said. “Those are the places where we have failed as America.”</p> <p>President Joe Biden lamented the milestone in a statement Friday night, saying, “After nearly two years, I know that the emotional, physical, and psychological weight of this pandemic has been incredibly difficult to bear.”</p> <p>He again urged Americans to get vaccinations and booster shots. “Two hundred and fifty million Americans have stepped up to protect themselves, their families, and their communities by getting at least one shot — and we have saved more than one million American lives as a result,” Biden said.</p> <p>Just 64% of the population is fully vaccinated, or about 212 million Americans, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>Nor is COVID-19 finished with the United States: Jha said the U.S. could reach 1 million deaths by April.</p> <p>Among the dead is Susan Glister-Berg, 53, of Sterling Heights, Michigan, whose children had to take her off a ventilator just before Thanksgiving after COVID-19 ravaged her lungs and kidneys.</p> <p>“She’s always cared more about people than she did herself. She always took care of everyone,” said a daughter, Hali Fortuna. “That’s how we all describe her: She cared for everyone. Very selfless.”</p> <p>Glister-Berg, a smoker, was in poor health, and was apparently unvaccinated, according to her daughter. Fortuna just got the booster herself.</p>

“We all want it to go away. I personally don’t see it going away anytime soon,” she said. “I guess it’s about learning to live with it and hoping we all learn to take care of each other better.”

The latest bleak milestone came as omicron is loosening its grip on the country.

New cases per day have plunged by almost a half-million since mid-January, when they hit a record-shattering peak of more than 800,000. Cases have been declining in 49 states in the last two weeks, by Johns Hopkins’ count, and the 50th, Maine, reported that confirmed infections are falling there, too, dropping sharply over the past week.

Also, the number of Americans in the hospital with COVID-19 has declined 15% since mid-January to about 124,000.

Deaths are still running high at more than 2,400 per day on average, the most since last winter. And they are on the rise in at least 35 states, reflecting the lag between when victims become infected and when they succumb.

Still, public health officials have expressed hope that the worst of omicron is coming to an end. While they caution that things could still go bad again and dangerous new variants could emerge, some places are already talking about easing precautions.

Los Angeles County may end outdoor mask requirements in a few weeks, Public Health Director Dr. Barbara Ferrer said Thursday.

“Post-surge does not imply that the pandemic is over or that transmission is low, or that there will not be unpredictable waves of surges in the future,” she warned.

Despite its wealth and its world-class medical institutions, the U.S. has the highest reported toll of any country, and even then, the real number of lives lost directly or indirectly to the coronavirus is thought to be significantly higher.

Experts believe some COVID-19 deaths have been misattributed to other conditions. And some Americans are thought to have died of chronic illnesses such as heart disease and diabetes because they were unable or unwilling to obtain treatment during the crisis.

The Rev. Gina Anderson-Cloud, senior pastor of Fredericksburg United Methodist Church in Virginia, lost her dementia-stricken father after he was hospitalized for cancer surgery and then isolated in a COVID-19 ward. He went into cardiac arrest, was revived, but died about a week later.

She had planned to be by his bedside, but the rules barred her from going to the hospital.

“I think it’s important for us not to be numbed. Each one of those numbers is someone,” she said of the death toll. “Those are mothers, fathers, children, our elders.”

When the vaccine was rolled out in mid-December 2020, the death toll stood at about 300,000. It hit 600,000 in mid-June 2021 and 700,000 on Oct. 1. On Dec. 14, it reached 800,000.

It took just 51 more days to get to 900,000, the fastest 100,000 jump since last winter.

“We have underestimated our enemy here, and we have under-prepared to protect ourselves,” said Dr. Joshua M. Sharfstein, a public health professor at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. “We’ve learned a tremendous amount of humility in the face of a lethal and contagious respiratory virus.”

The latest 100,000 deaths encompass those caused by both the delta variant and omicron, which began spreading rapidly in December and became the predominant version in the U.S. before the month was out.

	<p>While omicron has proved less likely to cause severe illness than delta, the sheer number of people who became infected with it contributed to the high number of deaths.</p> <p>Ja said he and other medical professionals are frustrated that policymakers are seemingly running out of ideas for getting people to roll up their sleeves.</p> <p>“There aren’t a whole lot of tools left. We need to double down and come up with new ones,” he said.</p> <p>COVID-19 has become one of the top three causes of death in America, behind the big two — heart disease and cancer.</p> <p>“We have been fighting among ourselves about tools that actually do save lives. Just the sheer amount of politics and misinformation around vaccines, which are remarkably effective and safe, is staggering,” Sharfstein said.</p> <p>He added: “This is the consequence.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/04 Hawaii: Navy public health emergency
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/science-business-navy-veterans-hawaii-16c3422dd7463ca7a5ef588c50dd44ee
GIST	<p>HONOLULU (AP) — A giant U.S. government fuel storage installation hidden inside a mountain ridge overlooking Pearl Harbor has provided fuel to military ships and planes crisscrossing the Pacific Ocean since World War II.</p> <p>Its very existence was a secret for years. Even after it was declassified, few people paid attention — until late last year, when jet fuel leaked into a drinking water well, showed up in tap water and sickened thousands in military housing.</p> <p>Now the Navy is scrambling to contain what one U.S. lawmaker calls a “crisis of astronomical proportions.” Native Hawaiians, veterans, liberals and conservatives across Hawaii are all pushing to shut down the tanks even though the Navy says they’re vital to national security.</p> <p>Military medical teams have examined more than 5,900 people complaining of symptoms including nausea, headaches and rashes. The military has moved about 4,000 mostly military families into hotels and has flown in water treatment systems from the U.S. mainland.</p> <p>In the first six weeks since the water crisis emerged, the Navy spent more than \$250 million addressing the public health emergency.</p> <p>“Frankly, it’s been a nightmare and a disaster. A total disaster,” said U.S. Rep. Kaiali‘i Kahele.</p> <p>Kahele, a combat pilot who still serves as an officer in the Hawaii National Guard, is the lawmaker who characterized the crisis as astronomical at a hearing in December. An admiral said that the Navy takes the blame.</p> <p>“The Navy caused this problem, we own it and we’re gonna fix it,” Navy Rear Adm. Blake Converse, the deputy Pacific Fleet commander, told lawmakers last month.</p> <p>The military built the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility in the early 1940s by excavating caverns within the mountain ridge to protect 20 fuel tanks from aerial attacks. Each tank is about the height of a 25-story building and can hold 12.5 million gallons (47.32 million liters.)</p> <p>The tanks are connected to underground pipelines that send fuel about 2.5 miles (4 kilometers) to Pearl Harbor and to ships and planes used by the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines and Navy.</p>

The Navy hasn't determined how petroleum got in the water. Officials are investigating a theory that jet fuel spilled from a ruptured pipe last May and somehow entered a fire suppression system drain pipe. They suspect fuel then leaked from the second pipe on Nov. 20, sending it into the drinking water well.

Within a week, military families started complaining about health problems.

Lauren Wright remembers her skin peeling, feeling nauseous and vomiting. Her symptoms disappeared only when she stopped drinking, showering and washing dishes with her home's water.

"I'm a proud Navy spouse, but this is not right — to do this to your families," she said.

Since early December, Wright, her sailor husband and their three children ages 7 to 17 have been among the thousands of military families living in Honolulu hotels paid for by the Navy so they can have clean water.

The Navy has been trying to clear petroleum from the contaminated well and pump it out of the aquifer. Officials are also flushing clean water through the Navy's water system — which serves 93,000 people in military homes and offices in and around Pearl Harbor. Teams have separately visited homes and workplaces to flush individual water pipe systems.

But Wright said Marines sent to flush a neighbor's home received two days of training, failed to follow a checklist for the work and had to be taught how to do the job by a neighbor with expertise.

"We're all afraid that we are going to be forced into our toxic homes and go right back to it," she said.

The first major complaints about the fuel complex came in 2014, when 27,000 gallons (123,000 liters) leaked from one tank but didn't get into the drinking water.

The Navy blamed contractor error and ineffective oversight. The Sierra Club of Hawaii and Honolulu's water utility warned leaks could seep into one of Honolulu's most important drinking water aquifers, located just 100 feet (30 meters) below the tanks, but the Navy resisted calls to move the facility.

The aquifer normally supplies more than 20% of the water consumed in the city. After the latest spill, Honolulu's water utility shut off three wells to prevent petroleum from migrating through the aquifer into the utility's drinking water.

If the biggest of the three wells remains shut, about 400,000 people in neighborhoods including downtown and Waikiki could face rationing and outages during the summer when water demand increases.

The Navy last month said it would comply with an order by Hawaii Gov. David Ige, a Democrat, to drain the tanks and not use them until it's safe to do so. But it reversed course this week and appealed to get more time to work on solutions.

The Navy has said draining the tanks wouldn't affect short-term Pacific operations, but commanders said they would give congressional members a classified briefing on longer-term implications.

Many Hawaii residents, including Republican state Rep. Bob McDermott, say the dangers posed by the tanks justify getting rid of the fuel complex forever. The Marine veteran has two sons in the Navy, one son who is a Marine veteran and another currently at Marine Corps boot camp.

"I'm very close to the military, but these things are too old. It's just that simple. And if they're going to look at infrastructure for the next century, they need to fill these things in with dirt," said McDermott.

Forty-eight of the 51 members of the state House of Representatives signed a letter to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin calling for the tanks to be decommissioned. State senators are considering legislation to outlaw them.

Hawaii's four-member congressional delegation has secured wording in recent legislation requiring the Navy to study fuel storage alternatives.

Esther Kia'aina, a Honolulu city council member, said public trust in the military in Hawaii could be scarred if the Navy doesn't close the tanks for good.

"This is a watershed moment. This is a turning point for the military's relationship with Hawaii," said Kia'aina, who was an Interior Department assistant secretary during the Obama administration.

She warned that failure to shut them down could jeopardize the military's ability to obtain lease extensions for state lands under sites like Pohakuloa Training Area, a Big Island site used by the Army and the Marines.

Converse, the deputy Pacific Fleet commander, said during the congressional hearing that the Navy is working to restore public trust.

"We recognize how much these events impacted the lives of so many, and we are firmly committed to restoring safe drinking water in a manner that builds trust and protects the land and the waters of Hawaii," Converse said.

Hawaii has been a strategically important outpost for the U.S. military since the early 1900s, when it set up a coal refueling station for steam-powered warships at Pearl Harbor. Today defense spending accounts for 8.5% of Hawaii's gross domestic product.

Activist protests got the Navy to stop bombing Kahoolawe Island for target practice in 1990. This time, opposition to the military is broader because it involves water, something that everyone connects to, said Colin Moore, a University of Hawaii political science professor.

"I don't think they have any friends on the island at this point," he said.

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HEADLINE	02/05 Canada truck convoy's GoFundMe cut off
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/gofundme-for-canadas-freedom-convoy-cut-off-refunds-to-be-issued
GIST	<p>GoFundMe said it is cutting off funding for those participating in the so-called Canadian "Freedom Convoy" after determining the effort violated its terms of service due to unlawful activity.</p> <p>The crowdfunding site had already suspended the fundraising effort, which had raised about 10 million Canadian (US \$7.8 million), but said Friday it will refund or redirect to charities the vast majority of the money raised in support of those protesting COVID-19 measures in Ottawa.</p> <p>The company said in a statement they believed the intention of the Freedom Convoy fundraiser was to support a peaceful protest when it was first created, but said they now have "evidence from law enforcement that the previously peaceful demonstration has become an occupation, with police reports of violence and other unlawful activity."</p> <p>Thousands of protesters railing against vaccine mandates and other COVID-19 restrictions descended on the capital last weekend, deliberately blocking traffic around Parliament Hill. Police estimate about 250 remained, but deputy police chief Steve Bell said they expected 300 to 400 more trucks this weekend and more than 1,000 protesters on foot. He said up to 1,000 counter-protesters were expected as well.</p> <p>Many Canadians were outraged after some protesters urinated and parked on the National War Memorial. One danced on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. A number carried signs and flags with swastikas.</p> <p>Protest organizers are also now facing a class-action lawsuit over the continuous horn noise, filed on behalf of residents.</p>

Ontario's Conservative premier said the demonstrators were no longer participating in a protest, but called it now an "occupation" and said it is "time for this to come to an end."

Protesters have said they won't leave until all mandates and COVID-19 restrictions are gone. They are also calling for the removal of Trudeau's government, though it is responsible for few of the measures, most of which were put in place by provincial governments.

Meanwhile, GoFundMe said organizers were able to account for how an initial \$1 million that was released in funding earlier this week was spent, and said organizers said the money was only going to be used for participants who traveled to Ottawa to participate in a peaceful protest.

"Given how this situation has evolved, no further funds will be directly distributed to the Freedom Convoy organizers — we will work with organizers to send all remaining funds to credible and established charities chosen by the Freedom Convoy 2022 organizers and verified by GoFundMe," GoFundMe said.

GoFundMe's decision was met with both praise and criticism.

Ottawa police thanked GoFundMe for listening to the concerns and called "on all crowdfunding sites to follow." Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson did the same and said he hoped limiting the funding would restrict their ability to stay.

Tesla billionaire Elon Musk, who has shared his support for the convoy, criticized the decision Friday.

"Double standard?" [he quipped on Twitter](#) alongside a screenshot of a June 2020 GoFundMe that supported the "Capitol Hill Occupied Protest" in Seattle. He also shared a screenshot insinuating GoFundMe was "professional thieves."

Republican Florida governor Ron DeSantis tweeted Saturday morning that he'll be investigating what he called GoFundMe's "deceptive practices" alongside Florida attorney general, Ashley Moody.

"It is a fraud for @gofundme to commandeer \$9M in donations sent to support truckers and give it to causes of their own choosing," [the tweet read](#), in part.

At this time it is unclear where the undispersed donations would go if not refunded, though [GoFundMe said in its statement](#) the Freedom Convoy 2022 organizers would get to choose.

The convoy has also garnered support from former U.S. President Donald Trump and the opposition federal Conservative party in Canada, but two federal Conservative party lawmakers broke with the party and said the protest needed to end.

The Canadian Trucking Alliance, a federation representing truckers across the country, has estimated that 85% of truckers in Canada are vaccinated. It opposes the protest.

Some of the demonstrators are protesting a rule that took effect Jan. 15 requiring truckers entering Canada to be fully immunized against the coronavirus. The U.S. has the same rule for truckers entering the U.S.

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HEADLINE	02/05 World likely sicker than has been in 100yrs?
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-world-is-likely-sicker-than-it-has-been-in-100-years-11644057003?mod=hp_lead_pos1
GIST	The world is living through a unique moment: In the past five or six weeks, the Omicron coronavirus variant has likely gotten more people sick than any similar period since the 1917-18 flu pandemic, according to global health experts.

While Omicron infections [have peaked in many places](#), February is likely to see similar case loads as the variant continues to spread before it flames out, causing worker shortages from hospitals to factories and spurring debate about Covid-19 restrictions, particularly since [Omicron appears to be causing less serious illness](#).

In England, more than one in six residents are estimated to have caught the coronavirus since Omicron emerged in late November, surveys and modeling by the Office for National Statistics indicate. In Denmark, about one in five have caught the virus, and in Israel one in nine, authorities estimate.

“This is an unbelievably unique moment when so many people get infected by a pathogen at the same time,” said Christopher Murray, the director of the University of Washington’s Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, which tracks global health.

Roughly one in five Americans had contracted Omicron by the mid-January peak, a number that could double by the time the surge ends in mid-February, Trevor Bedford, a virologist at the Fred Hutch Cancer Research Center, estimated. “Having ~40% of the population infected by a single pathogen in the span of 8 weeks is remarkable and I can’t think of an obvious modern precedent. Flu seasons generally have perhaps 10% infected in the span of 16 weeks,” he wrote on Twitter.

Unlike previous waves of the pandemic, which infected fewer people and often surged in different parts of the globe at different times, the current wave is largely world-wide, even if parts of Asia still haven’t seen a substantial Omicron outbreak.

“If you don’t have friends infected right now, you don’t have friends,” Brenda Crabtree, a Mexican infectious-disease specialist, said on Twitter.

Not everyone who gets infected gets sick. The IHME estimates that as many as 80% to 90% of those infected may be asymptomatic, compared with about 40% with the Delta variant of the coronavirus and similar numbers for influenza. But that still likely leaves a record number of sick people in such a short period.

“Even if just 5% of those who got infected are sick, those are still very big numbers,” said Mr. Murray, adding that about 10% of his own university’s hospital—approximately 900 staff—were either out sick or tending to someone sick in mid-January. And influenza, while less prevalent than before the pandemic, is also circulating, adding to the rolls of the ill. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates two million Americans have had symptomatic flu so far this season, which began in October.

The impact on labor markets is threefold: Those who get sick, those who have to stay home to tend to sick family members, and those who are asymptomatic but test positive and have to stay home because of workplace and government guidelines.

As a result, unprecedented numbers of people who can’t work remotely are absent, which is hitting hospitals, airlines, schools and sporting events. In Brazil, up to one-fifth of healthcare staff called in sick last week in Rio de Janeiro state, which has also been hit by a flu outbreak. Between 10% and 13% of factory employees in Mexico have called in sick in recent weeks, according to estimates from Coparmex, the country’s largest industry chamber of commerce. “Some manufacturing firms have had up to 20% of the workforce out,” said Ricardo Barbosa, head of the labor committee at the chamber. “We’ve never seen anything like this.”

The scale and speed of Omicron’s spread make it comparable only to the 1917-1918 influenza pandemic, in terms of the percentage of the global population infected with the same virus in such a short period, said Dr. William Schaffner, a professor of infectious diseases at the University of Vanderbilt medical school.

“Obviously there have been other influenza pandemics that have occurred which we would think of as being close to this, but I think we’re playing in the major leagues here,” he said.

In January, there were more than 84 million positive Covid-19 cases world-wide, almost exactly the number of positive Covid-19 results during all of 2020, the year the pandemic got under way, according to numbers from Our World in Data. Fortunately, widespread vaccination, previous infection and better treatments kept the Covid-19-related death toll relatively low during the month, at 217,442.

Given that testing only captures a fraction of likely cases, however, as many as 95 million people a day around the world were likely catching Omicron in the early part of January, six times higher than the pandemic's previous peak, according to IHME estimates. It forecasts a sharp decline in new infections over the next few weeks, with the global surge ending by mid-March.

In the first half of December, about three million people across the U.S. [said they were at home from work](#) either sick themselves or taking care of a sick family member, according to numbers tracked by the Census Bureau.

The workplace strains and the evidence that Omicron is less severe than earlier variants are prompting more governments [to ease Covid-19 guidelines](#). The U.S. and U.K. have both reduced the isolation period for positive cases to five days from 10. Israel decided that students exposed to a confirmed case no longer need to miss in-person classes. In Dubai, authorities last week told healthcare workers exposed to the coronavirus that they don't need to isolate if fully vaccinated and have no symptoms, state-backed media reported.

Some governments are going further, encouraged by the idea that the wave of current infections will add to immunity from vaccines and set the stage for a significant decline in infections in coming months, ushering in a new stage where Covid-19 becomes endemic like a seasonal flu. Denmark and France this week said they would scrap many Covid-19 restrictions.

The World Health Organization warned against easing restrictions too quickly. "We're concerned that a narrative has taken hold in some countries that because of vaccines, and because of Omicron's high transmissibility and lower severity, preventing transmission is no longer possible and no longer necessary," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on Tuesday. "Nothing could be further from the truth. More transmission means more disease."

Caroline Ball, an accountant in London, says she knows about 15 families currently infected with the virus—more than she has known of at any one time in the past two years. During two weeks in mid-January, her husband and three young sons tested positive for the virus days apart. Their symptoms ranged from fever and fatigue to no sign of illness at all.

"Especially with Omicron and the boys being at school, it did feel like our time was going to come," she said. Children under 12 aren't routinely eligible for Covid-19 vaccines in the U.K.

Hospitals have been most affected by the surge, with more patients and fewer staff. Staff out sick with Covid-19 in English hospitals peaked in early January at almost 50,000, before the government reduced the isolation period for positive cases to five days with two negative test results, according to data from the National Health Service. More than a third of staff at one of Argentina's largest public hospitals, Hospital General Durand, were out sick or looking after sick family members, hospital officials say.

São Paulo, Brazil's largest city, hired several hundred new health workers to cope with staff absences. A local judge filed an injunction in mid-January preventing emergency-care health workers in São Paulo from going on strike after they planned walkouts this week over staff shortages.

"Everyone is exhausted...the biggest risk is that we get to a point where the system collapses," said Victor Vilela Dourado, an anesthetist from São Paulo and head of the city's doctors union.

In São Paulo, more than 600 bank branches temporarily closed in recent weeks because of lack of staff, according to the banking association. About 20% of workers at Brazilian bars and restaurants across the country have been sent home since December, according to the local industry association. Argentina's

	<p>state-run airline Aerolineas Argentinas said one-tenth of its 11,000 employees were out sick in mid-January, causing scores of flights to be canceled.</p> <p>The virus has also hit the world of sports. About 21 Premier League games have been called off because of Covid-19 infections in the U.K. in the past month, far more than the six total games postponed in the 2020-21 season. Argentina's soccer season is getting under way late because so many players are testing positive. India was forced out of the Women's Asian Cup soccer tournament after a dozen Covid-19 cases among players.</p> <p>New Delhi banker Abhishek Sharma is one of millions world-wide now faced with backed-up healthcare services. He kept trying to contact his family's longtime pediatrician Sameer Maqsood after the banker's 8-year-old came down with flulike symptoms. But the doctor wasn't answering his phone or responding to texts. In desperation, Mr. Sharma drove to the doctor's clinic in east Delhi and found a long line of sick children waiting. The doctor said he was forced to ignore his phone for the first time in two decades because of so many patients.</p> <p>"Looks like everyone is falling sick," the banker quoted Dr. Maqsood as saying.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/04 USDA stricter standards school nutrition
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/02/04/usda-announces-stricter-standards-school-nutrition/
GIST	<p>The Department of Agriculture announced Friday it is making changes to its school nutrition standards for the 2022-2023 school year, seeking to reinstate health goals that were rolled back during the Trump administration.</p> <p>The Biden administration will make schools and child-care providers offer low-fat or nonfat unflavored milks, and limit the fat in sweet flavored milks, among other things. At least 80 percent of the grains served in school lunch and breakfast each week must be considered rich in whole grains, under the new policies. And while the weekly sodium limit for school lunch and breakfast will remain at the current level, there will be a 10 percent decrease required for the 2023-2024 school year.</p> <p>These adjustments would mark a change from the direction that the Trump administration took when it came to nutrition standards at schools. Trump aides had rolled back rules, initially easing policies regarding whole grain, nonfat milk and sodium, citing food waste and nonparticipation as key rationales.</p> <p>Then the pandemic happened, forcing school administrators to scramble with complicated feeding schedules and logistics, as well as labor and food shortages. The USDA granted lots of extra flexibilities, repeatedly propping up the program financially and easing some guidelines.</p> <p>USDA Deputy Under Secretary Stacy Dean told reporters Thursday the pandemic has highlighted the essential role that school meals play in combating hunger and getting vital nutrition to the more than 30 million children who rely on these programs every day.</p> <p>About two-thirds of that 30 million qualify as low-income and are getting meals free or for a reduced price. Children from low-income households are disproportionately affected by obesity and are less likely to be fed healthy meals at home, so the nutritional makeup of those school meals is impactful. Kids can get more than half of their daily calories from school meals.</p> <p>A number of studies show that childhood obesity numbers have skyrocketed during the pandemic, with many American youths spending the year of remote learning being more sedentary and anxiety-snacking. Dean said the USDA is issuing a final rule establishing transitional nutrition standards for three specific areas in flux over the past few years "to give schools clear expectations for gradual transition from current pandemic operations to more nutritious meals."</p> <p>The Biden administration changes are largely a return to Obama-era nutrition standards established in 2012, which a USDA nutrition study found to have a dramatic effect on diet quality. For the 2009-2010</p>

school year, the Healthy Eating Index for breakfast was nearly 50 out of 100, rising to over 71 by the 2014-2015 school year. In that same time frame, the lunch score went from nearly 58 to above 81.

Some advocates say the new announcement doesn't go far enough. All other nutrition standards, including fruit and vegetable requirements, will remain the same as the 2012 standards with this change, with no mention of limiting added sugars. Still, some experts wonder if the changes will place too high a burden on already taxed nutrition programs.

The School Nutrition Association, the trade group for school-food-service manufacturers and professionals, is urging Congress to provide [additional support](#) by authorizing child nutrition waiver extensions through the coming school year. While the group applauded the release of transitional nutrition standards, according to association president Beth Wallace, "School nutrition professionals are frantic just trying to get enough food on the tray for our students amid relentless supply chain disruptions and labor shortages."

According to Geri Henchy, director of nutrition policy at the Food Research and Action Center, this is a balancing act. "This approach is really going to help move forward the nutrition of the meals and allows the schools to continue to function effectively," she said. "Schools can't make big changes at this point because of the supply chain and staffing. They have a lot of waivers at this point that are helping them, and this balances the needs of all the different sectors."

The USDA has been asking stakeholders for months what this should look like to accomplish the dual goals of getting school nutrition programs back on track with meal standards while helping schools move through and out of the pandemic with reasonable standards that include the realization that the supply chain disruptions are far from over, said Katie Wilson, executive director of the Urban School Food Alliance, a nonprofit created by school-food-service professionals.

"The message is very clear: We are using federal funds for these programs, and it is imperative that we continue to make the meals healthier. But due to circumstances out of our control the last two years, the USDA is willing to be more gradual about strengthening standards as we move forward," Wilson said. She said even the fairly slow rollout of stricter sodium standards allows schools to adjust, especially because they've had to rely on packaged foods that often have more salt during the pandemic.

One of the Food and Drug Administration's signature efforts to improve the nation's nutrition is focused on reducing the level of sodium in the food supply. The FDA took a critical step to help reduce sodium through [recent guidance](#) that establishes voluntary sodium reduction targets in processed, packaged and prepared foods. According to acting FDA commissioner Janet Woodcock, the USDA rule provides transitional standards for school meals to move toward more nutritious meals, including ones lower in sodium.

"This type of all-of-government coordination is also necessary to help reverse the course of diet-related chronic diseases and the disproportionate burden experienced by racial and ethnic minority groups," Woodcock and Susan Mayne, director of the FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, wrote in a statement.

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HEADLINE	02/04 CDC: N95, KN95 masks best protection
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/02/04/covid-mask-effective-n95/
GIST	<p>Wearing any kind of mask indoors is associated with significantly better protection from the coronavirus, with high-quality N95 and KN95 masks providing the best chance of avoiding infection, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported Friday.</p> <p>In indoor public settings, surgical masks reduce the chances of testing positive by 66 percent, the CDC estimated. Top-of-the-line N95 and KN95 masks, the tightfitting face coverings often worn by health-care workers, cut the odds of infection by 83 percent, the health agency said.</p>

Wearing a cloth mask appeared to lower the odds of testing positive by 56 percent, but the findings were not statistically significant.

“These data from real-world settings reinforce the importance of consistently wearing face masks or respirators to reduce the risk of acquisition of SARS-CoV-2 infection among the general public in indoor community settings,” the CDC said in its Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.

Mask-wearing has been a flash point for conflict from the earliest days of the coronavirus pandemic, when health officials told the public not to buy masks, which they said at the time should be conserved for medical professionals.

The government soon reversed course on masking against the airborne virus and urged everyone to wear face coverings.

Arguments over whether to mandate mask-wearing, who has the authority to order it and under what circumstances have endured to this day.

“There are still people who say masks don’t work,” said Linsey C. Marr, an expert on airborne virus transmission at Virginia Tech who was not involved in the new research. She said the CDC report bolsters the well-known value of mask-wearing by providing additional real-world data.

Similarly, Jose-Luis Jimenez, a professor of chemistry at the University of Colorado who did not take part in the study, said in an email that it “adds more evidence to what we already know: this is mainly an airborne virus, and for that reason we have an indoor pandemic. Wearing masks indoors reduces transmission, with the protective effect increasing for better mask quality and fit.”

The research was conducted by the California Department of Public Health between Feb. 18 and Dec. 1, 2021 — before the [omicron](#) variant wave hit the United States. Researchers surveyed 652 people who had recently tested positive for the virus and matched them with 1,176 who had tested negative. All were asked whether they had been in stores, churches, schools, restaurants and other indoor public settings in the 14 days before their test, whether they had worn a mask and how often. They also were matched by their vaccination status, among other characteristics.

In the last three months of the survey, 534 of the participants were asked what kind of mask they wore.

The researchers acknowledged that relying on participants’ recall of their behavior in multiple public indoor settings may have limited the reliability of the results, though they took steps to minimize the impact. They also did not account for other preventive steps participants may have taken, such as physical distancing.

Nevertheless, the advantages of mask-wearing were found to be substantial. They reinforced laboratory and other real-world testing that shows masks are an effective barrier to the coronavirus.

“What this shows is if you pay attention and wear a good mask and wear it all the time, you have a significantly lower risk of testing positive for covid-19,” Marr said.

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HEADLINE	02/05 US: if Russia invades, ‘embarrass Beijing’
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/05/ukraine-russia-nato-putin-germany/
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — As the diplomatic standoff between the West and Russia over Ukraine deepens, Russian President Vladimir Putin found a friendly audience in Chinese President Xi Jinping Friday, when the two leaders affirmed mutual grievances about the U.S.-led international order.</p> <p>The significance of Putin and Xi’s meeting on the eve of the Beijing Winter Olympics was not lost on the United States, and Daniel Kritenbrink, the top U.S. diplomat for East Asia, said that Moscow and Beijing have grown more closely aligned. But if Russia chooses to invade Ukraine again, the move could</p>

“embarrass Beijing” because “it suggests that China is willing to tolerate or tacitly support Russia’s efforts to coerce Ukraine,” he told reporters Friday.

Meanwhile, Kyiv will again welcome a string of diplomats and world leaders this week, including French President Emmanuel Macron, who will be in the Ukrainian capital on Tuesday, after his visit to Moscow on Monday. The French and German foreign ministers are also expected to be in Ukraine at the start of the week. Britain’s Boris Johnson and Turkey’s Recep Tayyip Erdogan met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky earlier in February.

Ukraine was not mentioned in a [sweeping joint document](#) issued by Moscow and Beijing Friday that framed their geopolitical ambitions — experts suggest the omission means China won’t give potential Russian aggression a blank check — but the statement complained about U.S.-led partnerships in the Asia-Pacific.

The declaration also did not mention the “Quad” group of democracies — the United States, Japan, India and Australia. But Krittenbrink indicated leaders of the four countries would address the Ukraine crisis at a summit later this spring “given the seriousness of the issue and the threat it poses to the rules-based global order.”

The already-tense war of words between the West and Moscow escalated further Friday. Earlier this week, the Biden administration warned that [Russia is considering filming a fake attack](#) against Russian territory or Russian-speaking people by Ukrainian forces as a pretext to invade its neighbor. The resulting propaganda footage could include “graphic scenes of a staged false explosion with corpses,” U.S. officials said.

The allegations — which Washington has not provided substantial evidence for — have drawn fierce denials from Moscow. On Friday, the Russian Embassy in Washington released a transcript of an exchange between Ambassador Anatoly Antonov and Newsweek, in which the diplomat said the U.S. accusations could be used as an “alibi” for a possible Western-backed military operation in Ukraine’s contested Donbas region, where Moscow-backed separatists have been locked in a conflict with Kyiv’s government forces for eight years.

“This lie is part of the information war against Russia,” Antonov [said](#), without presenting proof. “Washington has been provoking the whole world for several months with statements that Ukraine is about to become a victim of ‘Russian aggression.’”

The Kremlin continues to deny that it has plans to attack Ukraine. The Russian foreign ministry on Friday attacked Western leaders such as British Prime Minister Johnson for issuing warnings of Russian aggression, saying that they “provoke acrid laughter and jokes” and are “impossible” to take seriously, Russian news agency Tass reported.

Ukrainian officials, including Zelensky, have also taken issue with Washington calling an attack from Russia “imminent” because it could cause panic and hurt Ukraine’s economy. They have also denied that Russia has already assembled the forces necessary to launch an attack. (White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Wednesday that the administration has stopped using that term.)

Following combat training exercises Friday in a ghost town near the site of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov said “the term ‘imminent invasion’ doesn’t work” — a direct jab at the language U.S. officials had been using.

Speaking near Ukraine’s border with Belarus, where thousands of Russian troops have massed ahead of military training exercises that U.S. officials fear could be used as a springboard for an attack from Ukraine’s northern border, Reznikov said he doesn’t believe Russian President Vladimir Putin has made a decision to invade yet. Latest estimates from military analysts have some 130,000 Russian troops massed around Ukraine as Moscow has continued redeploying forces west.

“There are no [Russian] strike groups on the Ukraine-Belarus border,” Reznikov said. “I’m not concerned.”

As [the United States deploys some 3,000 U.S. troops to Europe](#) as a sign of reassurance for NATO allies, German Chancellor [Olaf Scholz](#) is walking a tightrope between standing unified with Washington and navigating Berlin’s close economic ties with Moscow.

Scholz, who took over from the crisis-vetted Angela Merkel, is headed for the United States over the weekend and will meet President Biden on Monday. The two leaders will discuss their “shared commitment to both ongoing diplomacy and joint efforts” on Ukraine, Psaki said. Scholz is also set to visit Kyiv and Moscow in mid February.

For the new chancellor, [steering his country’s Russia policy](#) has meant trying to helm a three-party coalition, negotiating with pro-Russian voices within his own party and navigating questions over the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline that would deepen Berlin’s reliance on Moscow for energy.

In a sign of close ties between senior members of Scholz’s left-of-center Social Democrats and the Kremlin, former chancellor [Gerhard Schröder](#) was nominated to join the board of Gazprom, a Russian state-owned energy giant, the company [announced](#) Friday.

“Germany’s Social Democrats have not ever come to terms with their position on Russia,” Mathieu von Rohr, a prominent German foreign affairs commentator, [said](#) on a recent Atlantic Council podcast. “The German position has been weak, indecisive from my point of view, and that has been a problem for the entire Western alliance.”

Germany has been reluctant to export arms to Ukraine, much to the consternation of Kyiv, though Scholz has recently indicated that “all options” — including the controversial Nord Stream 2 pipeline — are on the table for sanctions in the case of a renewed Russian invasion.

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HEADLINE	02/04 Ukraine sends public warning to Russia
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/03/world/europe/ukraine-american-missile-demonstration.html
GIST	<p>YAVORIV, Ukraine — With television cameras rolling, a Ukrainian soldier heaved an America-made missile launcher onto his shoulder and pressed a red button. The missile streaked out and blew a target — a pile of tires — to smithereens.</p> <p>For the more than two months after Russia began its military buildup near Ukraine last fall, the United States was quiet about its military aid to Kyiv, merely acknowledging sending arms that had been scheduled for delivery long ago.</p> <p>That has changed now. American cargo planes bringing weaponry and ammunition are arriving openly at Kyiv’s Borispol airport. And the Ukrainian army is making a point of showing media these newly delivered weapons at a military training area.</p> <p>In the last two weeks, seven U.S. cargo planes carrying a total of about 585 tons of military assistance have landed in Kyiv. After the latest plane arrived, on Thursday, Ukraine’s defense minister, Oleksiy Reznikov, posted on Twitter, “this is not the end! To be continued!”</p> <p>Along with ammunition for small arms, the planes also delivered a significant number of missiles to Ukraine. These include Javelin anti-tank missiles, which the United States has been providing to Ukraine since 2018.</p> <p>It also included a type of American-made, shoulder-launched missile that can blow up sandbagged fortifications and destroy partially buried bunkers. On Friday, Ukrainian soldiers fired 10 of the so-called “bunker busters” for international media, including a Japanese television crew.</p>

To critics of the policy of arming Ukraine, this weapon seems provocative. Within Ukraine, nearly half the respondents to an opinion poll published on Wednesday said they believed Western weaponry will deter Russia, but a third said they thought it would do the opposite — provoke an attack. The Russian government has objected to the weapons transfers, and Germany is staunchly opposed to them.

“I do not think it’s realistic to believe such weapons exports could turn around the military imbalance,” Annalena Baerbock, Germany’s foreign minister, said on a visit to Kyiv on Monday.

Ukraine’s policy of publicly displaying the new weaponry adds to their value as a deterrent, said Maria Zolkina, a political analyst at Democratic Initiatives Foundation. The media events, she said, will help “destroy the myth that an unprotected Ukraine as an easy catch for Russia.”

Ukraine’s foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, has said the weapons airlifts strengthen Ukraine’s hand in dealing with Russia.

“The stronger Ukraine is the lower are the risks of further Russian aggression,” he said in a video conference with journalists this week. “The more defensive weapons we get today the less likely we will need to use them.”

The United States is not the only country that has been arming Ukraine in the airlifts that began last month. The United Kingdom sent about 2,000 light anti-tank missiles. With approval from the United States, the Baltic countries of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia said they would transfer Stinger antiaircraft missiles, filling gaps in Ukraine’s weak air defenses. Poland has also said it will send antiaircraft missiles.

At the demonstration firing of the American bunker busters, only Ukrainian soldiers handled the weapon. They had been through a three-day course taught by instructors from the 53d Infantry Brigade of the Florida National Guard. The Americans stood aside, declining to appear on camera.

The launching tube and missile weigh about 15 pounds and look like a small, green log. When a missile was fired, the whooshing noise rattled dishes on a picnic table set up to provide snacks for the visiting journalists. Ukrainian soldiers cheered when missiles hit the targets of tires and exploded in a red flash.

“It’s very simple, just a gadget,” said Ivan, a 25-year-old Ukrainian senior sergeant, now trained in firing the new missile, who declined to give his last name for security reasons. The soldiers also covered their faces with balaclavas to protect their identities.

But the training itself was simple, Ivan said. “A boy or a girl of any age can fire it. It’s like an iPhone.”

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HEADLINE	02/04 CDC adds wastewater data to Covid tracker
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/04/world/cdc-wastewater-covid.html
GIST	<p>More than a year after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention established its National Wastewater Surveillance System, the agency added wastewater data to its Covid-19 data tracker on Friday, providing a quick glimpse of whether the levels of coronavirus are rising or falling in hundreds of communities across the country.</p> <p>People who are infected with the coronavirus shed the virus in their feces, and analyzing wastewater can help officials estimate how prevalent the virus is in a particular community and which variants are circulating.</p> <p>And because people with the virus often begin shedding it before they seek care or testing — if they ever do — it can also provide an early warning system of coming surges or the circulation of new variants. Several communities detected Omicron in wastewater before any test samples from infected residents showed they had the variant.</p>

	<p>“These data are uniquely powerful because they capture the presence of infections from people with and without symptoms, and they’re not affected by access to health care or availability of clinical testing,” Amy Kirby, the program lead for the National Wastewater Surveillance System, said at a news briefing on Friday.</p> <p>The C.D.C., which established the system in September 2020, is now funding wastewater surveillance in 37 states, four cities and two territories, Dr. Kirby said. Not all of those jurisdictions have begun reporting data.</p> <p>The new dashboard, which will be updated daily, provides a color-coded view of how the levels of virus in the wastewater have changed in participating communities over the previous 15 days.</p> <p>But its coverage is limited, and provides an uneven view of the nation’s wastewater monitoring efforts. Of the 255 sites currently reporting data, many are concentrated in Wisconsin, Missouri and Ohio. More than a dozen states — including Idaho, Louisiana, Mississippi and Montana — are reporting no data at all.</p> <p>Another 250 sites will be added to the dashboard in the next few weeks, Dr. Kirby said, though even then not all states will be covered.</p> <p>“The real power of this program will be more evident in the coming weeks when hundreds more testing sites will begin submitting data,” she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/04 Younger less benefit boosters than older
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/04/health/covid-boosters-older-younger.html
GIST	<p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Thursday night published new data on the risks of hospitalization and death from Covid-19 among people who are unvaccinated and vaccinated, with or without booster doses.</p> <p>The agency recommends booster shots for Americans 12 and older. These are the first comprehensive data on the effectiveness of boosters by age in the United States.</p> <p>The figures confirm that booster doses are most beneficial to older adults, as the C.D.C. has previously reported. But the new numbers for younger Americans were less compelling. In those age groups, vaccination itself — two doses of the Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines, or one dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine — decreased the risk of hospitalization and death so sharply that a booster shot did not seem to add much benefit.</p> <p>The data run only through the end of December, when the Omicron surge had just begun. Because the variant is so highly contagious, booster shots may have helped limit the variant’s spread through the population, an argument for boosters that would not be fully captured in the new research.</p> <p>Still, several recent studies have found that vaccination alone, without boosters, remained strongly protective against severe illness and death in most people, even after Omicron’s appearance.</p> <p>“I do not think these data support a universal booster rollout for everyone,” said Dr. Celine Gounder, an infectious disease expert and epidemiologist at Kaiser Health News.</p> <p>Instead, boosters seem most essential for older adults, she said, and those who have certain immune conditions or live in long-term care facilities. In younger Americans, it may have made sense to make booster shots available only to those with certain medical risks, she said.</p> <p>The advantages of booster shots in various age groups were hotly debated last fall, when the Delta variant was the primary form of the virus in the United States. But many scientists came to favor additional doses after the arrival of the highly contagious Omicron variant.</p>

“The effect of the booster can be seen in the data sets, but it’s far smaller than the effect of vaccination compared to not,” said John Moore, a virologist at Weill Cornell Medicine in New York. “The real problem is the carnage among the unvaccinated.”

Unvaccinated people in every age group are at higher risk of infection, hospitalization and death than those who have been immunized, according to the C.D.C.’s data — a persistent trend ever since vaccines were introduced.

As of Dec. 25, the rate of hospitalization among unvaccinated adults older than age 65 was 246 per 100,000 people. That rate dropped to 27.4 per 100,000 among people who were vaccinated without a booster dose, and to 4.9 among those who were vaccinated and received a booster.

There were roughly 44 deaths per 100,000 unvaccinated adults 65 and older. Vaccinations dropped that number to about 3.6 deaths per 100,000, one-twelfth as much. Booster shots reduced the rate further, to about 0.5 deaths per 100,000, a figure 90 times as small.

But such risk comparisons were less useful in younger people, for whom the rate of severe outcomes was already low.

Among adults 50 to 64, 73 unvaccinated adults per 100,000 were hospitalized, compared with nine per 100,000 among those who were vaccinated and just two per 100,000 among those who had also received a booster shot.

Boosters made less of a difference in the number of Covid deaths in this age group. Vaccinations decreased the rate to 0.4 deaths per 100,000 from 8.26 per 100,000. With boosters, that number fell to 0.1 deaths per 100,000 people.

“This is the difference between a relative risk reduction and an absolute risk reduction,” Dr. Gounder said. “If you’re starting off with a relatively low risk, and you further reduce that risk, in the big picture that may not be such a big impact.”

The agency did not provide hospitalization numbers for adults 18 through 49, perhaps because the numbers were too small. Dr. Gounder added that such data “would be really helpful in guiding decisions about boosters.”

The C.D.C. also did not release data for children age 12 and older, possibly because boosters have not been recommended for long enough in that age group to have generated meaningful numbers.

The risk of Covid death among Americans ages 18 to 49 was low. The rate was about 0.9 per 100,000 people among the unvaccinated, and plummeted to 0.03 among people who were vaccinated. With the addition of a booster, deaths were too low to measure.

“I’m in favor of boosters, but I don’t want to overstate their importance,” said Dr. Dan Barouch, a virologist at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston.

“The benefit of a booster dose is clearly greater in the elderly,” he added. It “is progressively less in the lower risk groups.”

One argument for a universal booster recommendation was to limit the number of infections among all groups and reduce the spread of the virus. The Omicron variant was able to sidestep immune defenses and infect many more people than previous variants, including many who were vaccinated.

Booster doses cut the risk of infection in vaccinated people by about half across all age groups. The gap between unvaccinated and vaccinated groups was much greater. The numbers most likely reflect only symptomatic cases, and may be different for asymptomatic infections, Dr. Barouch noted.

The figures may also vary with time: Boosters were administered fairly recently, and early data from Britain suggest that their effect may wane in a few months, he added.

Some people have worried about persistent symptoms even after a mild bout of Covid. But a recent study suggested that the risk of so-called long Covid is highest among people with one of [four predisposing factors](#), including Type 2 diabetes and the presence of autoantibodies.

If the C.D.C. had taken a more targeted approach to booster recommendations, younger adults who have one of those risk factors and were concerned about long Covid could still have chosen to receive a booster, Dr. Gounder said.

Still, the new data may not make any difference — to the C.D.C.’s recommendations on boosters, or to the general public.

“The booster policy is the booster policy. It’s not going to change,” Dr. Moore said.

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HEADLINE	02/05 Amid coups, Covid: Africa focus on soccer
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/05/world/africa/africa-cup-of-nations-soccer-unity.html
GIST	<p>YAOUNDÉ, Cameroon — She had watched some of the matches secretly, volume turned down low so that nobody would report her. She had seen the threats, and knew that she could be kidnapped or killed for watching the African soccer tournament that her country, Cameroon, was hosting.</p> <p>But she was fed up with containing her excitement each time Cameroon scored, so on Wednesday, Ruth, who lives in a region at war where secessionist rebels have forbidden watching the games, secretly traveled to the capital, Yaoundé, to support her team in person.</p> <p>“I’d love to scream, if it’s possible,” she said on Thursday, after safely reaching Yaoundé, while getting ready for the big game. “I decided to take the risk.”</p> <p>African soccer is nearing the end of what everyone agrees has been a magnificent month. The 52 games in this year’s much-delayed Africa Cup of Nations tournament have brought some respite for countries going through major political upheaval or war, and those weathering the disruption and hardship wrought by Covid.</p> <p>For a while, it was the year of the underdogs. Small nations like Comoros and Gambia defeated normally mighty teams like Ghana and Tunisia, and a goalkeeper named Jesus became an instant hero in Equatorial Guinea when he saved twice in a penalty shootout against the far bigger Mali.</p> <p>Then it became a fight between bigger dogs — the last four countries were Egypt, Cameroon, Senegal and Burkina Faso. But even as nations have dropped out, fans have switched allegiances to other countries, citing a culture of brotherhood that transcends borders.</p> <p>Across the continent, in packed bars, airports and village clearings and on city sidewalks, each time there is a match, clusters of spectators open beers and make glasses of strong, sweet tea, pull up plastic chairs and rough wooden benches, and settle in for 90 minutes of nail-biting delight.</p> <p>When their team won the day after the coup last week in Burkina Faso, Burkinabe soldiers back home danced with joy. When Senegal then beat Burkina Faso in the semifinal on Wednesday night, Dakar’s streets were filled with cars honking and flags waving. Online, after every match, thousands of people flock to Twitter Spaces to jointly dissect what happened.</p> <p>Bitterly split countries have come together, however briefly, and the solidarity — person to person, group to group, region to region — is palpable. Even in Cameroon, where a deadly conflict has been raging since late 2016, soccer has brought people together.</p>

The crisis there started when teachers and lawyers in an English-speaking region in the west went on strike to protest the use of French in courts and classrooms. The repressive, mostly francophone government responded with [a harsh crackdown](#). [Human rights abuses](#) by the military helped fuel a fully-fledged armed struggle by English-speaking fighters known as Amba boys, after Ambazonia, the name they have given their would-be state.

The separatists have warned people there not to watch Afcon, as the soccer tournament is known, and certainly not to support Cameroon. But many anglophones like Ruth — a government worker who asked to be identified by only her first name to protect her from retribution — have defied the risk and have traveled to majority francophone cities to attend matches.

“We may not be a very united nation, but I think this one thing brings us together,” Ruth said, adding that it was common knowledge that even as they threatened, kidnapped and tortured other spectators, the Amba fighters were watching the tournament in their camps.

[Afcon is special](#). Players who are relatively unknown outside their countries’ borders play alongside multimillionaire stars from the world’s most elite teams who take time off to represent their countries, right in the middle of the European season.

It is all worth it, Mohamed Salah, Egypt’s star player, said last week in a news conference before his team met, and tied, with Ivory Coast.

“This trophy, for me, would be completely different to others I’ve won,” said Mr. Salah, a player who has won both the Premier League and the Champions League with his other team, Liverpool Football Club. “It would be the closest one to my heart.”

One country that has managed to focus on soccer despite a major crisis back home is Burkina Faso. While the Burkinabe players and fans were about to set off for the quarterfinal, the military [overthrew their government](#).

“It wasn’t easy,” said Sambo Diallo, a fan standing with his arms out in a Yaoundé hotel bursting with fans from Burkina Faso, as a friend painted his entire head, face and torso with his country’s flag. “We weren’t happy, but we had to be brave.”

Despite the anxiety about their families at home, Burkina Faso’s players won that quarterfinal. Still on a high, a green bus full of cheering Burkina Faso fans who had followed their squad around the country rolled into Yaoundé on Wednesday afternoon. Their team was about to meet Senegal in the semis.

Soccer had obviously brought the Senegalese team together, the jewel in its crown one of the biggest stars on the continent, Sadio Mané, who also plays for Liverpool.

But it also knit together another team of seven young men, one that traveled with the players wherever they went. Every match, each member paints his chest with a letter that, when they all stand next to each other, spells out S-E-N-E-G-A-L.

These are men of very different fortunes from the players’: In their lives back home, they are builders, clerks and street hawkers who earn little but drop everything whenever their country needs them to take up their mantle of body paint.

And they support each other. While they have been in Cameroon, one of them, the first E, missed the birth of his son, on the day that Senegal beat Cape Verde. But the others pitched in to pay for the baptism party back home in Dakar, which took place the day of the Senegal-Burkina Faso match. And a few years ago, the A lost his wife, and sometimes he goes off by himself to cry a little. But the others are on the case — they are all trying to find him a new girlfriend to cheer him up.

In matching red, yellow and green caps and pants, the seven letters warmed up the crowd on Wednesday with call-and-response chants of “Senegal — Rek!” — “Only Senegal” in the Wolof language.

“Two-nil!” shouted Babacar Sylla, who has been the N since 2004. That was the score he wanted. Hopes were high on both sides.

“If we win, I’ll take the cup back to Burkina Faso myself,” yelled Aminatou Nougara, who is Burkinabe but lives in Cameroon, and came with her daughter Soukaina to support the team.

“With the coup and the terrorism and everything, this will bring people back home a bit of relief,” said Abdou Moumini, a Burkina Faso fan, at halftime, the score standing at 0-0. But in the end, Senegal prevailed, 3-1, and will face Egypt in Sunday’s final.

Over a beer at Chez Tonton Andre, a bar at a busy Yaoundé intersection, Ghejung Awunti, a regional commissioner for the English-speaking northwest region, chatted with two of his colleagues. They had come at considerable risk to Yaoundé to watch Cameroon play — the vice president of the regional assembly they worked for had been kidnapped in December.

But, he said, “Football goes beyond politics.”

Ruth managed to get tickets to see Cameroon play Egypt in Thursday’s semifinal at the new, multicolored Olembe Stadium built for the tournament, and where on Jan. 24 [eight people died in a stampede](#). But she got stuck in heavy traffic on her way, and could not make it in time for kickoff. So she ducked into a bar and watched the match there.

Cameroon lost, 3-1, on penalty kicks. “It was still worth it because I could watch with excited fans,” she said.

And she screamed and shouted a lot.

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HEADLINE	02/05 Ukraine gave up nuclear weapons; regrets
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/05/science/ukraine-nuclear-weapons.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=US%20Politics
GIST	<p>At the end of the Cold War, the third largest nuclear power on earth was not Britain, France or China. It was Ukraine.</p> <p>The Soviet collapse, a slow-motion downfall that culminated in December 1991, resulted in the newly independent Ukraine inheriting roughly 5,000 nuclear arms that Moscow had stationed on its soil. Underground silos on its military bases held long-range missiles that carried up to 10 thermonuclear warheads, each far stronger than the bomb that leveled Hiroshima. Only Russia and the United States had more weapons.</p> <p>The removal of this arsenal often gets hailed as a triumph of arms control. Diplomats and peace activists cast Ukraine as a model citizen in a world of would-be nuclear powers.</p> <p>But history shows the denuclearization to have been a chaotic upheaval that shook with infighting, reversals and discord among the country’s government and military. At the time, both Ukrainian and American experts questioned the wisdom of atomic disarmament. The deadly weapons, some argued, were the only reliable means of deterring Russian aggression.</p> <p>Today Ukraine has no easy path to producing or acquiring the materials to build a bomb. Even so, the nuclear genie is once again stirring as Russian troops encircle the nation and wage a shadow war in its easternmost provinces.</p>

“We gave away the capability for nothing,” said Andriy Zahorodniuk, a former defense minister of Ukraine. Referring to the security assurances Ukraine won in exchange for its nuclear arms, he added: “Now, every time somebody offers us to sign a strip of paper, the response is, ‘Thank you very much. We already had one of those some time ago.’”

Western analysts say the current Ukrainian mood tends to romanticize the atomic past. “The gist is, ‘We had the weapons, gave them up and now look what’s happening,’” said [Mariana Budjeryn](#), a Ukraine specialist at Harvard University. “On a policy level, I see no movement toward any kind of reconsideration. But on a popular level, that’s the narrative.”

“Regret is part of it,” Dr. Budjeryn, a Ukrainian native, added in an interview. “The other part is whatever one feels as a result of being subjected to injustice.”

At first, [Ukraine rushed](#) to get the Soviet arms off its soil. Bombs, artillery shells, land mines and the relatively small warheads atop short-range missiles were the easiest to relocate and most likely to fall into unfriendly hands. More difficult to move were the long-range missiles, which could weigh 100 tons and rise to a height of nearly 90 feet.

In January 1992, a month after the Soviet Union ceased to exist, Ukraine’s president and defense minister [ordered military commanders](#) and their men to pledge loyalty to the new country — a move that would exert administrative control over the remaining arms. Many refused, and the soldiers who managed Ukraine’s nuclear forces fell into a period of tense bewilderment over the fate of the arsenal and its operational status.

[Volodymyr Tolubko](#), a former nuclear-base commander who had been elected to the Ukrainian Parliament, argued that Kyiv should never give up its atomic edge. In April 1992, he [told the assembly](#) that it was “romantic and premature” for Ukraine to declare itself a nonnuclear state and insisted that it should retain at least some of its long-range warheads. A residual missile force, he declared, would be enough to “deter any aggressor.”

While his stance never gained wide support, “it compounded existing tensions,” according to [a detailed history](#) of Ukraine’s nuclear disarmament.

In the summer of 1993, [John J. Mearsheimer](#), a prominent international relations theorist at the University of Chicago who was [no stranger to controversy](#), lent his voice to the issue of atomic retention. He [argued in Foreign Affairs](#) that a nuclear arsenal was “imperative” if Ukraine was “to maintain peace.” The deterrent, he added, would ensure that the Russians, “who have a history of bad relations with Ukraine, do not move to reconquer it.”

In Kyiv, the government in 1993 went so far as [to consider seizing operational control](#) of its nuclear missiles and bombers. But that never came to pass.

Instead, Ukraine punted. It demanded that, in exchange for nuclear disarmament, it would need ironclad security guarantees. That was [the heart of the agreement](#) signed in Moscow early in 1994 by Russia, Ukraine and the United States.

In late 1994, the pledges [got fleshed out](#). The accord, known as the [Budapest Memorandum](#), signed by Russia, Ukraine, Britain and the United States, promised that none of the nations would use force or threats against Ukraine and all would respect its sovereignty and existing borders. The agreement also vowed that, if aggression took place, the signatories would seek immediate action from the United Nations Security Council to aid Ukraine.

While Kyiv had failed to get what it wanted — the kind of legally binding guarantees that would come with a formal treaty ratified by the U.S. Senate — it received assurances that Washington would take its political commitments as seriously as its legal obligations, [according to Dr. Budjeryn](#), a research analyst at the [Managing the Atom](#) project at Harvard’s Kennedy School.

In May 1996, Ukraine saw [the last of its nuclear arms](#) transported back to Russia. The repatriations had taken a half decade.

What undid the diplomatic feat was the “collective failure” of Washington and Kyiv to take into account the rise of someone like [Vladimir V. Putin](#), Steven Pifer, a negotiator of the Budapest Memorandum and a former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine [now at Stanford University](#), said in an interview. After Russian troops invaded Crimea in early 2014 and stepped up a proxy war in eastern Ukraine, Mr. Putin [dismissed the Budapest accord](#) as null and void.

“They’ve been fighting a low-grade war for eight years,” Mr. Pifer, who just returned from Kyiv, said of the Ukrainians. “You can’t find bullets in the stores. A lot of civilians are arming up.”

In Ukraine, the Crimean invasion and the lengthy war led to [a series of calls](#) for atomic rearmament, according to Dr. Budjeryn, author of “Inheriting the Bomb,” [a forthcoming book](#) from Johns Hopkins University Press.

In March 2014, Volodymyr Ohryzko, a former foreign minister, argued that Ukraine now had the moral and legal right to reestablish its nuclear status. In July, an ultranationalist parliamentary bloc introduced a bill for arsenal reacquisition. Later that year, a poll showed that public approval stood at nearly 50 percent for nuclear rearmament.

Last year, Ukraine’s ambassador to Germany, Andriy Melnyk, [said Kyiv](#) might look to nuclear arms if it cannot become a member of NATO. “How else can we guarantee our defense?” Mr. Melnyk asked. The Foreign Ministry denied that such options were under consideration.

Western experts, including Dr. Budjeryn, see the Ukrainian stirrings and threats as empty gestures given the tangle of scientific, logistical, financial and geopolitical challenges that Kyiv would face if it opted for nuclear rearmament. Kyiv could encounter the same dilemmas that have confronted Tehran, which has worked steadily for decades to acquire the know-how and materials to build a bomb — all of which Ukraine apparently lacks.

More widely, experts fear that the current crisis could turn Ukraine from an example of arms-control benefits to one of atomic-disarmament risks, and drive the [Irans](#) and [Saudi Arabias](#) of the world to pursue their own nuclear arms programs.

“If a diplomatic solution is not achieved, it will reinforce the impression that nuclear-armed states can bully nonnuclear states” and thus “reduce the incentives” for disarmament, said Daryl G. Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association in Washington.

Mr. Pifer, the former ambassador to Ukraine, argued in the interview and [a 2019 analysis](#) that the high costs of rearmament would ultimately include Ukraine finding itself alone in any crisis or confrontation with Russia.

“A lot of countries are supportive of Ukraine,” he said of the current standoff. If, however, the nation went nuclear, Mr. Pifer added, “that support would dry up quickly.”

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HEADLINE	02/05 Immigration driving population growth
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/05/us/immigration-census-population.html
GIST	Overall, 2021 will go down as the year with the slowest population growth in U.S. history. New census data shows why: Both components of growth — gains from immigration, and the number of births in excess of the number of deaths — have fallen sharply in recent years. In 2021, the rate of population growth fell to an unprecedented 0.1 percent.

Yet within these sluggish figures a new pattern is emerging. Immigration, even at reduced levels, is for the first time making up a majority of population growth.

In part this is because Americans are dying at higher rates and having fewer babies, trends accelerated during the coronavirus pandemic. But it's also because there are signs that immigration is picking up again.

Even after four years of stringent controls on immigration imposed under former President Donald J. Trump, the overall share of Americans born in other countries is not only rising, but coming close to levels last seen in the late 19th century.

The numbers are not nearly what they once were. The latest report, from the Census Bureau's population estimates program, showed a net gain of [244,000 new residents](#) from immigration in 2021 — a far cry from the middle of the previous decade, when the bureau regularly attributed annual gains of one million or more to immigration.

Yet that drop-off pales in comparison to the slowdown in what demographers call “natural increase,” the excess of births over deaths. In 2021, that figure was 148,000, or one-tenth the gain that was normal a decade ago, and smaller than international migration for the [first time ever](#).

As of December, immigrants represented 14.1 percent of the U.S. population, matching the peak of the decades-long immigration boom that began in the 1960s and approaching the record 14.8 percent seen in 1890, shortly before large numbers of Europeans began disembarking from vessels at Ellis Island.

The foreign-born population is increasingly concentrated among middle-age groups, with a large number of immigrants having lived in the United States for many years. About 1 in 5 Americans between the ages of 40 and 64 was born overseas. And two-thirds of foreign-born residents have been in the country more than a decade, the census data shows.

In that respect, the country's demographics reflect the long-term effects of the huge levels of immigration it experienced during the 1970s and 1980s.

“We get so used to being around people who have been here for decades and navigate American society seamlessly that we almost forget they're immigrants,” said Tomás Jiménez, a Stanford professor who researches immigration and assimilation.

The recent slowdown in immigration was an apparent result not only of the tougher immigration policies, but also measures taken in response to the Covid-19 health crisis. In the early months of 2020, the government sealed the borders with Mexico and Canada and limited international entries by air. The closure of U.S. consular offices around the globe derailed visa processing.

But the data suggests that tougher restrictions on the border may not have been the biggest factor in the slowdown. Many immigrants decided to leave the country. During the first years of Mr. Trump's administration, the number of immigrants coming into the country held steady, while the number leaving increased, figures show.

Some data suggests that the pace of immigration has picked up lately. U.S. Customs and Border Protection reported a [surge in enforcement activity](#) last year, and the Census Bureau's monthly employment survey also detected an uptick in foreign-born respondents in late 2021.

The economic and political circumstances that compel people to leave their home countries have persisted, and demand for foreign workers of all skill levels remains brisk.

The newcomers since President Biden took office come from all over the globe, as the government has lifted the cap on refugees, welcomed thousands of families seeking asylum on the southwestern border and reopened the door to foreign workers on temporary visas.

If immigration returns to even its relatively modest prepandemic pace, it is possible the share of Americans born overseas could reach the record 14.8 percent from 1890.

The current labor shortage has heightened calls for foreign workers, in fields as varied as restaurant service and nursing, to help fill vacancies.

“The pandemic offers a little taste of what we may be facing if demand is robust and we don’t have workers,” said Pia Orrenius, a senior economist who studies immigration at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas. “We will see price and wage inflation, and growth will be choked off.”

“Immigration is not going to make this problem go away, but it certainly could help,” Ms. Orrenius said.

If immigration had continued at a prepandemic pace, the economy would have two million additional foreign-born workers in occupations such as manual labor and computer science, according to a recent study by economists at the University of California, Davis.

While the pandemic is seen as contributing to the slowdown in new immigration, it may have also helped prop up the number of foreign-born residents since that number depends not just on how many immigrants arrive but also how many leave. Virus travel restrictions made it harder for immigrants to enter the United States, but they also made it less likely they would depart, said Jeffrey Passel, a senior demographer at the Pew Research Center.

“During the pandemic, you couldn’t leave the country basically,” he said.

Some of the growth in the foreign-born population is related to a surge of migrants at the southwestern border that has been going on, to varying degrees, since 2014. But it is almost impossible to know the full extent. Not only is there no reliable accounting of how many people are entering the country illegally, it is not clear how many of them are being quickly expelled.

The decline in birthrate that has resulted in foreign-born people becoming an ever-larger share of the population is part of a worldwide demographic pattern. Historically, nations see a drop in birthrates as they become more prosperous, a trend that can undermine that prosperity.

When low fertility is coupled with low mortality, the result is a bulging population of seniors and relatively fewer workers to sustain them, a scenario faced by Japan and many European countries that then saw their economies shrink.

The movement of the baby boom generation out of the labor force amid a plummeting birthrate has put into sharper relief the need to reverse the decline in new immigration. This will be crucial, analysts say, despite the large numbers of immigrants already living in the country — soon those here legally will be drawing more from Social Security and Medicare.

The immigrants already here may provide part of the solution. Foreign-born residents typically account for a disproportionate share of all births because recent immigrant women are more likely than others to be in their prime childbearing years and to have more children.

Lower immigration from Mexico, traditionally the biggest source of new immigrants, has contributed to falling U.S. birthrates overall.

But it will take bold political moves to harness the economic benefits of the existing foreign-born population. Already, an estimated 11 million of them are undocumented, meaning they can work only as part of the underground economy. Mr. Biden took office with a pledge to legalize them but has failed to win bipartisan support for such a move in Congress.

	<p>He took steps to jump-start legal immigration, rescinding a proclamation by his predecessor banning the entry of foreigners on work visas.</p> <p>Last month, his administration unveiled policies to attract international students and to extend the time that foreign graduates in science and technical fields can remain in the country to work, from one year to three years.</p> <p>In December, the government announced that 20,000 seasonal guest worker visas would be added to the allotment of 33,000 for the winter to assist employers in landscaping, construction and hospitality, desperately in need of workers.</p> <p>Yet Mr. Biden's Republican opponents have consistently resisted large increases in new immigration, and the question of how the country moves forward is likely to be debated as campaigning picks up steam for this year's congressional elections.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/04 Ukraine worried about Crimean Peninsula
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/04/world/europe/russian-troops-ukraine-crimean-peninsula.html
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — While Russian is not yet capable of mounting a total invasion of Ukraine, portions of its army have reached full combat strength and appear to be in the final stages of readiness for military action should the Kremlin order it, according to an assessment by the Ukrainian military's high command.</p> <p>Of particular concern to Ukrainian officials is the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014. In the last two weeks, Russia has deployed an additional 10,000 troops to the region, including infantry and airborne forces; more ominously, it has put some commands on the highest level of readiness, according to the military's assessment.</p> <p>Along with recent efforts to strengthen forces near two Kremlin-backed separatist enclaves in Ukraine, the deployments mean that Russia could soon be fully prepared to begin military actions along about 800 miles of Ukraine's eastern and southern borders, according to the assessment.</p> <p>The assessment was described in general terms by a senior Ukrainian military official who spoke on condition of anonymity to disclose confidential intelligence findings. It broadly aligns with newly released satellite images showing a significant military buildup in Crimea over the last few weeks.</p> <p>But it is not just Crimea. Along much of Ukraine's border, analysts are seeing what they describe as a near textbook example of a modern military making final preparations for war. They cited the arrival of logistical infrastructure like hospital and communications units, electronic equipment meant for disrupting enemy communications, air power and additional troops to man equipment that was deployed earlier.</p> <p>"What unnerves me is how methodically they're going through this," said Dara Massicot, a senior policy researcher at the RAND Corporation. "It's by the book. You know what's coming next and it shows up."</p> <p>The Kremlin's ultimate intentions remained unclear, the Ukrainian official said, echoing the determination of American officials who say that President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia has yet to decide whether to attack.</p> <p>Russia has roughly 130,000 troops massed near Ukraine's border, U.S. and Ukrainian officials say. The Kremlin has said repeatedly it has no plans to attack, and Mr. Putin — while claiming that the United States was trying to goad Russia into war — was less strident in his language in an appearance this week, leaving the door open for future diplomacy.</p> <p>The Ukrainian military's assessment of Russian capabilities diverges from one the Pentagon provided last week, which said that Moscow had deployed sufficient troops and military hardware to mount a full invasion. But it moved Ukraine's military leadership closer to the American position.</p>

And the assessment painted a dire picture of Russian combat readiness in Crimea, an area that has drawn less attention than the Russian troop buildup in the east and, more recently, its moving of forces into Belarus on Ukraine's northern border.

On top of the tens of thousands of troops already stationed in Crimea, Russia has recently deployed two additional battalion tactical groups — battle ready forces of up to 1,000 troops plus tanks, armor and artillery. This includes one group of airborne troops and another that arrived with 10 trains' worth of equipment and armor, the senior Ukrainian official said.

Ukrainian military officials assess that additional forces are on the way, including a subdivision of national guard troops, which could be deployed to hold territory in the event of an invasion.

Moreover, several units deployed to Crimea have been put on the Russian military's highest state of military readiness, the official said, including marine forces based near the Kerch Strait, which separates mainland Russia from Crimea, and at the headquarters of Russia's Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol. Troops in other locations have been put on the second highest level of alert, the official said.

Satellite images released by Maxar, a space technology company, this week confirm a buildup of forces in Crimea. They show the addition of numerous tent camps in areas close to military equipment, an indication that troops had arrived or were on the way.

The senior Ukrainian official said any incursion could start with localized action and that, if successful, could prompt the Russians to expand the conflict zone. "For now, they're doing everything they can to panic us and panic the West," the official said, calling it "a real game of poker."

The Crimea troops are augmented by Russian naval forces deployed to the Black Sea and Sea of Azov, a small strategic body of water over which Ukrainian and Russian forces have clashed repeatedly in recent years. Last April, Russia dispatched its Caspian Flotilla to the waters around Ukraine for exercises and left behind several large landing craft.

Ukrainian officials are now watching the movements of six Russian landing vessels capable of deploying tanks and thousands of troops that Russia has sent from its Baltic and Northern Fleets for exercises in the Mediterranean for any signs that they may continue into the Black Sea.

"It's a huge assault grouping," Ihor Kabanenko, a retired admiral with the Ukrainian Navy, said. "We have not enough capabilities at sea to adequately respond to such a Russian deployment."

Beyond Crimea, military analysts say it may only be a matter of weeks before the crescent of troops deployed along Ukraine's northern, eastern and southern border is ready for action.

Until now, such forces might have looked menacingly large, but they lacked the supply lines and other logistical infrastructure needed to fight.

The satellite images showing row upon row of tanks that have appeared regularly in newspapers were most likely meant to send a message and force a conversation, said General Philip M. Breedlove, who was formerly the supreme allied commander of NATO.

"You've seen the pictures of the trucks lined up," Gen. Breedlove said. "That is not in tactical or offensive formation. That's a formation for show."

All that has started to change in recent weeks with the arrival of Iskandar-M cruise missiles, fighter jets and helicopters, according to satellite imagery, Ukrainian and western intelligence assessments and Russia's own military announcements.

In some areas where Russia still does not have enough personnel to man equipment, more troops appear to be arriving daily, officials and analysts say. And there is still a question of whether the Russian military has been able to muster sufficient reserve forces for any prolonged military campaign.

In the coming weeks, Russia will likely conduct a series of military drills meant to test the preparedness of its forces, said Michael Kofman, the director of Russia studies at CNA, a research institute based in Arlington, Va. After that, the troops need only to get in their vehicles and head for the Ukrainian border, he said.

What a military operation might look at this point is hotly debated.

In late January, Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III and Gen. Mark A. Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that Russia had deployed enough forces to invade all of Ukraine, and suggested that fighting could even extend to the streets of Kyiv, the capital, something Mr. Kofman agrees with.

“The Russian military is positioning itself to be able to conduct a large scale military operation against Ukraine, and its force posture indicates that if given the order they’re going to conduct a multi-axis attack,” Mr. Kofman said.

Under Ukraine’s assessment, Russia would be unable to sustain an invasion across different points of attack for more than a week because of a lack of supplies including ammunition, food and fuel deployed to front line positions, nor does it have sufficient reserve forces.

In most areas there are enough forces available for smaller, localized assaults that could be used as a diversion from a main attack coming from the east or south where forces are stronger, according to the assessment.

For weeks, Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelensky, has attempted to play down the severity of the Russian threat, though even he now appears to be growing more concerned.

“This is not going to be a war of Ukraine and Russia,” should diplomatic efforts still underway fail, Mr. Zelensky said last week. “This is going to be a European war, a full-fledged war.”

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HEADLINE	02/04 Pierce Co. health officials: \$18M shortfall
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article258028968.html
GIST	<p>Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department officials say they are running short of money to address the COVID-19 pandemic for 2022 and need upwards of \$18 million to make up the deficit.</p> <p>Where that money might come from is up in the air, but county officials expressed some apprehension in approving more funds from county coffers.</p> <p>During the Board of Health’s Feb. 2 meeting, TPCHD staff estimated a \$18.27 million shortfall in money needed to appropriately respond to the pandemic this year.</p> <p>The Omicron variant increased anticipated pandemic costs for 2022, and staff said some COVID-19 programs could run out of funding by March.</p> <p>Three Pierce County officials who sit on the board shared concerns about approving more county funds.</p> <p>County Executive Bruce Dammeier pointed out that the county has been the only local government to spend federal dollars on the health department’s COVID-19 response.</p> <p>County Council Chair Derek Young said there were initial asks of cities, including Tacoma, to help fund the health department’s pandemic budget, but TPCHD had “not gotten a positive response” from cities.</p>

“We are reaching a saturation level of the county’s portion of the investment,” Young said during the board meeting.

County Council member Dave Morell said he wants to see a line-item budget proposal brought before the council.

“It will be interesting to take a look and see what the council has in the couch under the cushions, but we have gone to the well several times in the county,” Morell said.

Tacoma deputy mayor Catherine Ushka said she would discuss the health department’s budget with the City Council.

“The first round that we had in [the American Rescue Plan Act] has largely gone to expenditures that are also related to the experience of COVID-19 throughout the community,” Ushka said. “Like many of us, we weren’t looking at needing to spend this level of money this far into this year.”

The health department 2022 COVID-19 budget is currently \$27.2 million, but updated projections estimate adequate response would require at least \$45.4 million. Kejuan Woods with the department’s communicable disease branch said the agency has added temporary staff to respond to the pandemic.

“Without additional funding, the shrinking of our operation will be triggered much sooner than we anticipated,” Woods said.

The health department’s request for \$14.4 million includes an additional \$6.4 million to continue to offer contact and case tracing, data and operations staffing and community engagement after the end of the first quarter in March.

Staff also said the Omicron variant has increased projected testing expenses this year — \$ 8 million more than the expected \$4.4 million budgeted, and \$1.9 million more for isolation and quarantine centers.

“The demand for testing and the needs for isolation quarantines have dramatically increased over the past few weeks. So this was not foreseen when the original 2022 proposal was developed,” administrative staffer Chris Schuler said. “The original proposal also assumed that our response needs for COVID would steadily taper off to the fall of 2022.”

While COVID-19 cases have started to drop, the last month has seen unprecedented numbers of reported positive cases.

Because the department has no authority to tax, TPCHD’s budget relies on various funding streams, including money from local governments, state dollars and grants. Responding to the coronavirus pandemic depends on dollars from the state health department and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). County money also feeds into the health department to set up testing sites, contact tracing and operations.

By May 2022, Pierce County is expected to receive a total \$175.7 million from Congress’ American Rescue Plan Act. Only half — \$88 million — has reached the county, almost all of which has been allocated to help the health department, businesses and homeless programs. A total of \$15.6 million went to the county’s public health response since May 2021.

For 2022, \$10.78 million of the county’s ARPA dollars were set aside for this year’s coronavirus response, the health department reports.

Cities also received ARPA funding. Tacoma was allocated \$61 million. Lakewood was allocated nearly \$13.8 million. Cities have not contributed to the health department’s 2022 COVID-19 response, Woods said.

	<p>At the same time the local health department is asking for more local ARPA allocations, there is also a shortage of \$3.8 million needed for programs that FEMA and state dollars usually fund, including vaccine clinics and vaccine education.</p> <p>“When that runs out, we would not have direct funding for the vaccine clinics,” Schuler said. Woods told board members that the numbers could change by the time the department presents a budget request to the County Council later this month.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/04 Seattle’s lifeblood Third Ave. endangered
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/third-avenue-is-seattles-endangered-lifeflood/
GIST	<p>Living on Third Avenue now, I hear gunshots in the night. My residential building is constantly broken into by burglars.</p> <p>This is a new phenomenon on my end of Third, emerging in recent months. Farther south on Third, a man was shot at a bus stop Wednesday morning. My colleague Danny Westneat recently pointed out that violent crime is rising throughout the city to levels not seen since the early 2000s.</p> <p>Segments of Third have always had problems, around Pike-Pine and near the King County Courthouse. Every mayor comes in promising to fix it, yet here we are. It’s worse than ever before.</p> <p>The expanding rot of Third Avenue, alas, is at least two years in the making. Third lacks the leafy beauty of Fourth or the condo canyon of Second, but it is still one of the most important commercial streets in Seattle and the main downtown bus corridor. It’s the city’s lifeblood.</p> <p>But it’s in deep trouble.</p> <p>Nineteen brick-and-mortar retailers or restaurants closed on Third this past year alone, including a busy Starbucks. Other closings since early 2020 include such major retailers as Bed Bath & Beyond, Bergman Luggage, Macy’s, Columbia Sportswear, T.J. Maxx, IGA Kress grocery and Bartell Drugs.</p> <p>Jon Scholes, president of the Downtown Seattle Association, told me, “Given the function it plays — buses, dense employment, culture, near shopping, the convention center and Pike Place Market — Third Avenue is everybody’s street. It’s the lobby to our city and should be the most welcoming street. Today it is not.”</p> <p>The reasons are several: The pandemic emptied out offices, mostly peaceful protests after the 2020 murder of George Floyd were accompanied by a riot downtown and repeated looting. Crime rose, including organized shoplifting, while the Seattle police lost officers. Tents proliferated.</p> <p>Finally, the boarded-up storefronts violated one of the axioms of Jane Jacobs, the mother of urbanism, “eyes upon the street.” For a city of strangers to feel safe mingling together, “there must be eyes upon the street, eyes belonging to those we might call the natural proprietors of the street.”</p> <p>Third “has not had the attention, commitment or resources given to public safety, pedestrians, businesses along the street and its function as a high-density transit corridor,” Scholes said. “The central section ... centered between Stewart and Union remains a major challenge. Our surveys show these are places people want to avoid.”</p> <p>Public safety is especially failing.</p> <p>“We need a level of commitment from the public sector that we haven’t seen over many years,” Scholes said. “That includes increased maintenance, security, social services and breaking up of drug markets. Third has been turned over making it possible to operate illegal businesses openly. Those running illegal enterprises have capital from goods stolen from adjacent retailers. They use vulnerable people as labor and as customers.”</p>

One of Third's additional challenges is the unintended consequence of it being a busy bus corridor. For example, lost parking spaces on Third played a role in Zanadu Comics closing its brick-and-mortar store, one of the delights of downtown.

Bus stops were crowded and lacked security, putting passengers at risk and blocking sight lines, thus concealing criminals in the throng.

Third Avenue is overburdened as a transit corridor. When creating it, officials failed to follow best practices, such as wider sidewalks, more inviting waiting areas, and better security and maintenance. [Copenhagen, Denmark, for example](#), operates corridors with all-electric, high-frequency buses that have lower floors and easy boarding.

With light rail completed to Northgate, Seattle has the opportunity to reconfigure transit downtown. More buses could use Second Avenue, too. Building the First Avenue streetcar is another essential step.

"What happens on Third will be a litmus test on whether Seattle has turned a corner in addressing substance abuse, drug dealing, homelessness, safety and shoplifting," Scholes said. "New retail deals are at risk. It's a critical and fragile moment on Third and in the retail core."

He agrees with me that we have assets other cities would kill for, including those in the central core: The flagship Nordstrom, Pike Place Market, the transit tunnel and cultural amenities, including Benaroya Hall on Third.

"But street abandonment by the municipal government is a big impediment to bringing in new retailers," he said. "They have to lock into a 10-year lease and [have] confidence it will be safe for customers and employees. It's something that endangers bringing conventions and tourism and workers back."

It endangers more: The businesses trying to make a stand on Third, such as Wild Ginger restaurant and the Gelatiamo snack shop, whose struggles were highlighted in [an article by Mike James](#) in the Post Alley blog.

I'm waiting for signs that new Mayor Bruce Harrell and new tough-on-crime City Attorney Ann Davison understand that Third is ground zero in reclaiming Seattle. This is everybody's street, certainly not one owned by criminals.

The streets problems go beyond crime, to be sure.

But all Seattleites will be victimized until this essential artery is cleaned up. Harrell, Davison and the City Council need to solve the riddle of Third, which has been a can kicked by every previous administration. Otherwise, it will continue to be a scar running the length of downtown, spreading its troubles to other streets, too.

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HEADLINE	02/04 DOH: 1,367,769 cases,10,967 deaths
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article258072903.html
GIST	The Washington state Department of Health reported 7,813 new COVID-19 cases on Friday. Statewide totals from the illness caused by the coronavirus are 1,367,769. As of Friday, the preliminary death tally is 10,967. The confirmed death tally is 10,620 as of Jan. 18.
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HEADLINE	02/04 NKorea skips Beijing Olympics
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/sports/olympics/someone-elses-festival-no-north-korea-at-all-ys-olympics/

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — During the last Winter Games, North Korea basked in the global limelight in South Korea, with hundreds of athletes, cheerleaders and officials pushing hard to woo their South Korean and U.S. rivals in a bid for diplomacy that has since stalled.

Four years later, as the 2022 Winter Olympics come to its main ally and neighbor China, North Korea isn't sending any athletes and officials — ignoring the International Olympic Committee's suggestion that individual athletes could potentially compete despite a ban on the country. And though the country again finds itself on the world stage, this time it is because of belligerence, not charm, in the shape of a fast-paced string of increasingly powerful missile tests.

These tests are likely an attempt to do two things at once: perfect still-incomplete weapons systems that the North feels it needs to protect itself from its enemies, while also using the worry over those improving systems to wrest outside concessions and sanctions relief from the United States and South Korea.

Even if Pyongyang pauses or curtails those tests during the 17-day sporting spectacle that opened Friday — in a nod to its benefactor Beijing — experiments on bigger weapons, including ICBMs and nuclear bombs, could follow the Games, experts say. That's especially true as South Korean presidential elections, U.S.-South Korean military drills and several important North Korean anniversaries are approaching.

"For North Korea, the Beijing Olympics are still someone else's festival, and what's important now is furthering their own interests," said Nam Sung-wook, a professor at Korea University in South Korea. "North Korea thinks it doesn't need to promote a peaceful image any longer through the Olympics as the United States will only notice them when they display a hardline posture by missile launches."

North Korea has often used Olympics and other sports events for political purposes, perhaps most spectacularly at the Pyeongchang Winter Games four years ago in the South.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un dispatched his powerful sister, Kim Yo Jong, the first member of that ruling family to walk on South Korean soil since the Korean War, to the frigid opening ceremony. There, she sat in the same viewing box as the South Korean president and U.S. vice president.

None of North Korea's 22 athletes won a medal. But the country made a huge impression in the viewing stands, where its all-female cheering squads, dressed in matching red jumpsuits, performed meticulously choreographed routines alongside South Korean fans as they rooted for the Koreas' first combined Olympic team in women's ice hockey.

There was similar cooperation during the so-called Sunshine Era of the late 1990s and early 2000s, when North Korea received huge aid shipments from South Korea and the North frequently allowed its players to parade together with South Koreans at Olympics and other sports events.

The good feelings between the Koreas in Pyeongchang helped lay the ground for leader Kim to reach out to then-U.S. President Donald Trump for high-stakes nuclear summit talks later in 2018. Their diplomacy, however, collapsed the next year after Trump rebuffed Kim's calls for needed sanctions relief in return for limited denuclearization.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in, a key player in the 2018 Olympics diplomacy, made a strong push to use the Beijing Games as yet another venue for Korean peace. He sought to have the leaders of the Koreas, the United States and China gather in Beijing and symbolically declare an end to the 1950-53 Korean War, which still technically continues.

The North, however, announced it was skipping the Games because of the coronavirus pandemic and moves by "hostile forces," and has ignored Seoul and Washington's repeated offers for talks as it restarted missile tests.

Last September, the International Olympic Committee suspended North Korea until the end of 2022 for refusing to send a team to the Tokyo Summer Olympics in 2021, which Pyongyang also skipped because

of the virus. Still, there were hopes in Seoul that the Beijing Olympics could help ease Korean animosities — and the IOC left the door open for athletes to compete, if not represent their country. But the North did not walk through it.

North Korea's decision to avoid the Olympics, even as it proceeds with a tentative reopening of land-based trade with China following two years of pandemic border closures and economic decay, could reflect Pyongyang's frustration with Seoul and its inability to extract concessions from Washington on its behalf, said Moon Seong Mook, an analyst for the Seoul-based Korea Research Institute for National Strategy.

Even with the IOC ban, Moon, the analyst, said, the North "still could have pursued diplomatic opportunities on the sidelines, with the Games being hosted by ally China." Instead, the North Koreans are "saying that they don't want to get involved at all."

More than that, the North has pursued a course that the West sees as provocative.

In January alone, North Korea carried out seven rounds of missiles tests, including a medium-range weapon capable of hitting the Pacific U.S. territory of Guam. That is a record monthly number of weapons tests since Kim assumed power in December 2011. North Korea also recently threatened to lift a four-year moratorium on long-range missile and nuclear tests.

While Chinese officials may have been unhappy about North Korea's testing spree right before the start of the Games, China seems publicly willing to tolerate the tests amid a growing confrontation with Washington.

The North certainly needs China. Beijing is North Korea's economic pipeline, and its support is crucial if the North is going to revive its pandemic-battered economy. On Friday, Kim sent a message to Chinese President Xi Jinping saying the Beijing Olympics "strikingly demonstrate the dynamic spirits of China" and that he would boost bilateral ties to a new high stage with Xi.

Many observers are predicting a host of weapons tests after the Games meant to increase pressure on Washington.

Those could include a submarine-launched missile, a longer-range missile capable of reaching the American homeland or a nuclear device. Other options are a banned rocket launch to place a spy satellite into orbit or unveiling an advanced submarine.

The North may want these tests as a way to influence or draw attention to the March 9 presidential election in South Korea, the annual U.S.-South Korea joint military exercises in March, or the 110th birth anniversary of state founder Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Un's grandfather, on April 15.

It's unclear whether any attention-getting launches will result in the United States giving North Korea sanctions relief, international recognition as a legitimate nuclear state or security guarantees.

The Biden administration has offered open-ended talks but has showed no willingness to ease the sanctions unless North Korea takes real steps to abandon its nuclear weapons program. North Korea, for its part, has said it won't return to talks unless the United States drops its hostile policies first, which may be a reference to U.S. troops stationed in the South and international sanctions against its illicit weapons program.

If past events are any indication, Pyongyang and Washington could eventually meet again after a period of elevated confrontation, something the nations have repeatedly done since the first North Korean nuclear crisis in the early 1990s.

But Nam, the professor, said it's unlikely that U.S.-North Korea relations will have any major breakthrough under the Biden administration.

	<p>“In the past 30 years, they’ve confronted each other to an extreme degree before meeting again and reaching some deals,” said Kim Yeol Soo, an expert at South Korea’s Korea Institute for Military Affairs. “What’s scary in this repeated process is the fact that North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs have continuously advanced in the meantime.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/04 CDC: 2 deaths Dole salad listeria outbreak
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/02/04/dole-salad-listeria-outbreak-tied-2-deaths-13-hospitalizations-cdc-says/
GIST	<p>Two people have died and 13 have been hospitalized in connection with a multistate listeria outbreak involving Dole packaged lettuce products, federal health officials said this week.</p> <p>All told, 17 cases have been recorded in 13 states, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, including fatalities in Michigan and Wisconsin. Dole last month announced a recall of packaged lettuce and salad kits processed at plants in Springfield, Ohio, and Soledad, Calif.</p> <p>Affected products include shredded lettuce, mixed greens, garden salads and Caesar salad kits, among others. The company has recalled more than 70 products sold under multiple labels, including Dole, Ahold, HEB, Kroger, Lidl, Little Salad Bar, Marketside, Naturally Better, Nature’s Promise, President’s Choice and Simply Nature.</p> <p>Packages tied to the outbreak include “best if used by” dates from Nov. 30, 2021, through Jan. 9, 2022, and include lot codes on the upper right corner of the package that begin with the letters B, N, W or Y, according to the CDC.</p> <p>Listeria can cause a variety of food poisoning symptoms in healthy individuals, and more severe symptoms in those who are immunocompromised. It also has been known to cause pregnancy loss or premature birth, and serious illness or death in newborns.</p> <p>Dole spokesman William Goldfield said in an emailed statement that the company was “confident” that it identified and corrected the issues that caused the listeria outbreak.</p> <p>“Throughout the FDA and CDC investigations, Dole provided full access and transparency into all of our facilities, our processes, and our operations,” Goldfield said. “Delivering safe, high-quality fruits and vegetables is our top priority, and we are deeply saddened and sorry that we did not meet our standard.”</p> <p>The CDC says illnesses have been reported in Idaho, Iowa, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah and Wisconsin. Those sickened ranged from 50 to 94 years old.</p> <p>The agency cautioned that the number of sick people reported is probably an undercount and that the outbreak may not be limited to states with known illnesses. This is because some people recover without medical care or are not tested for listeria.</p> <p>Health officials recommend throwing out or returning any food items attached to the recall, as well as cleaning the refrigerator and wiping down food-preparation surfaces with bleach, including the outside of sealed packages.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/04 WA ESD to layoff temporary staff workers
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/washington-unemployment-agency-to-cut-nearly-800-staff-as-federal-funds-run-out/
GIST	<p>Washington’s unemployment agency is sending out layoff notices to a quarter of its own staff, due to the loss of temporary federal money.</p>

That's renewing questions about the state's capacity to promptly process claims and pay benefits.

Officials at the Employment Security Department say losing the 769 temporary workers, brought on to help with heavier claims volumes earlier in the pandemic, won't bring back problems from that period, when claimants sometimes waited months for benefits and spent hours on hold with agency's call centers.

"We feel confident that we are retaining enough staff to be able to address our upcoming workload," said Nick Demerice, ESD spokesperson.

But some labor and worker advocacy groups question whether the cuts could affect several upcoming initiatives. That includes an agency review of thousands of claims for federal pandemic benefits that were denied but now may be eligible for payment.

"How are they going to wade through all of this?" said Anne Paxton, policy director with the Seattle- and Spokane-based Unemployment Law Project, which represents people who are denied unemployment benefits. "It's not a great time to cut back."

Positions subject to layoffs span the claims process — from call center staff to those who review disputed claims or investigate suspected fraud to supervisors, Demerice said.

ESD officials say they had no choice about the cuts, which will be completed by the end of April. The 769 positions were paid for with federal funds, including money that automatically rises and falls with the volume of unemployment claims. Those funds increased sharply in 2020 as pandemic-related layoffs hit Washington and other states, but have since fallen off, Demerice said.

"We don't have an option to keep these people — we don't have the funding," Demerice said. "Our funding model dictates that we have to lay these people off."

Many of the workers will be transferred to other agency roles, Demerice said.

ESD's headcount as of December 31, 2021, prior to the layoffs, was 2,909, of which 2,082 were permanent positions, according to [the agency's website](#). As of December 31, 2019, the headcount was 1,669, according to the state Office of Financial Management, which did not break out permanent and temporary positions.

The agency's declining workload is reflected in the falling numbers of Washingtonians filing for unemployment. For the week ending Saturday, the ESD received 4,848 new, or "initial," claims for jobless benefits, according to data [posted](#) Thursday.

That represents a 2.4% increase over the prior week, but it's a small fraction of what ESD saw during the first two months of the pandemic in spring 2020, when new claims were averaging around 133,000 a week.

Even after the early wave of layoffs subsided, new claims averaged around 24,000 a week for the rest of the year.

Those high volumes led to massive delays in benefit payments by ESD, as it did in most states. Delays worsened after the agency [discovered a wave of unemployment fraud](#) in May 2020 and [briefly suspended payments](#) and subjected many claimants to additional, time-consuming scrutiny.

Still more delays occurred as workers who'd had their benefits denied by ESD and had appealed were forced to wait months while [their appeal was processed by ESD and heard by the state Office of Administrative Hearings](#).

More issues emerged in late 2020 after federal eligibility requirements led ESD to send [overpayment notices to tens of thousands of Washingtonians demanding they repay unemployment benefits](#) — in [some cases approaching \\$20,000](#) or [more](#).

ESD responded by bringing on [hundreds of third-party contractors](#) and received assistance from [National Guard troops](#). The agency also hired temporary workers with federal funds and, partly in response to [pressure from state legislators](#) and [litigation by workers and advocacy groups](#), began [making upgrades to its phone and online systems and its communications](#). The agency also agreed to suspend collections actions such as garnishments or liens, Demerice said.

ESD has since reported significant improvements. The number of claimants waiting three weeks or longer for payment on a claim was around 500 as of Monday, Demerice said, compared with nearly 25,000 in December 2020. Average hold times at ESD call centers were just under 11 minutes in December, down from nearly 42 minutes in January 2021, according to ESD data.

But some problems have lingered.

When ESD denies a claim and a claimant appeals, the agency is still taking around 35 days to do a secondary review and transmit the appeal to the Office of Administrative Hearings, according to OAH data.

That's down from nearly 45 days in June 2021, but it's up around nine days over the 2021 average — and far above the pre-pandemic turnaround of two to three days, OAH data shows.

Some labor and worker advocacy groups wonder whether the agency could lose more ground as it is forced to cut staff just as it embarks on several new initiatives. These include reviewing unemployment claims for a delayed federal pandemic program which will retroactively pay \$100 a week for qualifying workers who lost both regular income and self-employment income in the pandemic.

A potentially larger task comes as ESD administers a 2021 federal policy change requiring states to revisit previously denied claims for federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, which paid benefits to many contractors, part-timers and others not covered by regular unemployment benefits.

Under the federal policy, some workers can “self-certify” that, for example, they didn’t return to work because of COVID-related workplace safety concerns. Qualifying claimants could retroactively collect denied federal benefits.

ESD officials say they don’t yet know how many claimants may be eligible — although Demerice said ESD is timing the layoffs so as not to undercut the programs.

But labor and worker advocacy groups will be closely watching to see whether ESD actually can absorb those cuts without falling behind again.

“We certainly hope that [ESD] will have the capacity to manage upcoming needs, but I think it’s hard to say at this point what our capacity will be in Washington,” said Sybill Hyppolite, legislative director with Washington State Labor Council and an employee representative on the state Unemployment Insurance Advisory Committee. “I think that we still have to watch and see.”

In the meantime, claimants and advocacy groups say they started to see more overpayment notices in December. Demerice said many of those are related to earlier eligibility questions, while others are generated as claims under appeal are finally resolved by OAH.

Demerice said some overpayment notices can be resolved by calling the agency or by applying for a waiver. In other cases, claimants can arrange payment plans, he said, adding that the agency is still not garnishing claimants’ wages or putting liens on claimants’ property.

	<p>Some claimants say that even if the overpayment problems can be resolved, the process is nerve-wracking.</p> <p>“It’s so stressful,” said Erica, a Seattle-area administrative specialist who received benefits in 2020 and 2021 and got an overpayment notice for around \$10,000 in December. She asked not have her full name published to protect her privacy.</p> <p>Although Erica has filed an appeal and was told by ESD that overpayment notices would be paused until her hearing, she said the challenges of dealing with ESD during the pandemic have made her fearful of any kind of communication from the agency.</p> <p>“Any time I get a notification from ESD, I get anxiety,” she said. “Because I don’t want to do anything wrong.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/04 WSHA, UW lawsuit: \$4M fake N95 masks
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/uw-wa-hospital-association-say-texas-company-sold-them-4-million-in-fake-masks/
GIST	<p>The Washington State Hospital Association and the University of Washington are suing a Texas company for allegedly selling them millions of dollars’ worth of counterfeit N95 masks early in the coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>According to a lawsuit filed Thursday in King County Superior Court, the first year of the pandemic left hospitals and health care organizations scrambling to get their hands on enough personal protective equipment for staffers, including medical masks, gowns and gloves that had fallen into short supply at a critical time.</p> <p>In fall 2020, the hospital association and UW Medicine learned that a Dallas company called CJFS Corp. was selling 3M-brand N95 masks, the complaint says. WSHA bought about 600 cases of 3M’s 1860-model N95 masks for \$1.4 million, while UW Medicine bought about 4,700 cases of 1860-model and 1860S-model N95 masks for \$2.6 million, according to the complaint.</p> <p>UW Medicine’s shipment of masks arrived in early December 2020, but employees soon noticed the manufacture and expiration dates printed on some of the packages were the same. When UW Medicine asked CJFS about the dates, the company acknowledged it was a “printing error” and agreed to replace the masks.</p> <p>UW Medicine kept about 85,000 of the 1860S-model masks that didn’t have an incorrect expiration date, and returned the affected masks to CJFS. About two weeks later, UW Medicine received replacements from CJFS.</p> <p>Near the end of December, WSHA received its shipment of masks and began distributing them to hospitals.</p> <p>In January 2021, however, 3M — one of the largest global producers of N95 masks — issued a statement warning customers and medical workers to be aware of counterfeit masks that had started circulating in the nation’s PPE supply. In the statement, 3M listed lot codes that corresponded to specific fake mask models not made by the company, which matched the ones WSHA and UW Medicine had received.</p> <p>After realizing the masks they received were fake, WSHA and UW Medicine reached out to 3M, which confirmed the masks CJFS sold were not genuine, and later received a notice of counterfeit product alert from CJFS, according to the complaint.</p> <p>“It is undisputed that CJFS provided counterfeit N95 masks to WSHA and [UW Medicine],” the lawsuit says.</p>

WSHA CEO Cassie Sauer said in a [statement at the time](#) that the masks had the appropriate paperwork and passed physical inspection and testing before being sent out to hospitals. In total, 40 hospitals received the fraudulent masks, Taya Briley, vice president of the hospital association, said Friday.

“Making sure that our health care workers have a good supply of the right kind of PPE to do this work is really important and our national supply chain has struggled throughout the pandemic to provide adequate amounts of PPE,” Briley said. “The fact that the supply chain has been so unable to keep up with demand had created these opportunities for fraudulent mask makers to be present in the supply chain.”

Still, the complaint says, CJFS has yet to provide a refund or send genuine masks to WSHA and UW Medicine.

Although CJFS met with WSHA to discuss the masks in March 2021, the company hasn’t been responsive since, despite attempts for mediation, according to Briley.

“By taking this next step, we hope to dissuade more fraudulent masks from entering the market,” she said. “It’s terrible. The whole point is to protect workers.”

The president of CJFS did not respond to a request for comment Friday.

Washington isn’t the only state that’s been battling counterfeit mask operations throughout the pandemic. Federal authorities, including the Food and Drug Administration, [have said they’re trying to crack down on fake PPE](#) — much of it [sold on Amazon](#) — and have revoked authorization for Chinese-made KN95s. They also continue to work with customs officials to stop banned imports, according to The New York Times.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, border agents have seized some 34 million counterfeit masks.

The CDC [recommends that people be cautious](#) of price swings and products that are listed as “legitimate” or “genuine,” and to look at reviews. [Other indicators of counterfeit masks](#) could also include markings on the face piece, no approval (TC) number, no markings from the National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health (or “NIOSH” is incorrectly spelled) or claims that they’ve been approved for children (NIOSH does not approve any type of respiratory protection for children).

Fraudulent coronavirus testing sites have also popped up in the U.S. throughout the past two years, including in Washington state, [where one company is being investigated for allegedly faking test results and lying to patients](#).

The testing centers “threatened the health and safety of our communities,” state Attorney General Bob Ferguson said in a statement this week. “They must be held accountable.”

Distributing enough masks for health care workers and community members still remains a challenge as the spread of the omicron variant keeps demand for PPE high, despite slowing infection rates, Briley said. The state hospital association recently ordered more N95 masks for hospital workers, but fortunately was able to purchase them directly from 3M this time, Briley said.

“But still, it’s like, ‘Here we go again,’ ” she said. “This is absolutely a nationwide problem.”

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HEADLINE	02/04 Winter Olympics nearly 100% artificial snow
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/verify/olympics-verify/winter-olympics-use-artificial-fake-snow-beijing-2022/536-cbc09c16-8105-4719-8bd7-0f00995e2c7f
GIST	According to a report from the Sport Ecology Group , the 2022 Beijing Olympics will make history as the first Olympics on “virtually 100% artificial snow.” Noah Molotch, associate professor of geography hydrology at the University of Colorado Boulder with expertise in snow hydrology and a doctorate in

hydrology, said this will be the first Winter Olympics to rely almost entirely on artificial snow and to knowingly plan to do so from the beginning.

“Many Olympic Games will rely on natural snowfall, but then hedge with artificial snow as needed to augment the natural snow,” Molotch said. “But in these particular games, they knew going in that it's a place that gets very little natural snowfall, and that they would rely exclusively on artificial snow.”

The Olympics’ use of artificial snow for the 2022 Games is confirmed in the [Beijing 2022 Pre-Games Sustainability Report](#). The report explains strategies the Beijing Organizing Committee is attempting to reduce water consumption in the creation of artificial snow, although the report doesn’t confirm the extent to which the Beijing Games will rely on artificial snow.

The Sport Ecology Group said artificial snow has been used in the Winter Olympics since the 1980 games in Lake Placid. Molotch said the snow in the 2014 Sochi Olympics, which were located in an unusually warm climate for the Winter Olympics, was 80% artificial.

“Artificial snow tends to be a lot more dense, a lot icier, a lot harder, more like concrete once it's formed on the ground; whereas natural snow can be more like powdery snow, lighter and fluffier,” Molotch said. “Natural snow can also become icy over time, but when it initially falls from the sky, it's quite light and fluffy.”

Artificial snow is good for keeping snow conditions consistent from the top to the bottom of a hill, making it good for downhill skiing and other competitions that rely on speed, Molotch said. For aerial events like the halfpipe, he said, artificial snow can be more hazardous to crashing athletes because of its firmness.

But there is no right formula of snow to eliminate hazards for the athletes. Molotch said that even a mixture of artificial snow and natural snow can become inconsistent on the surface and therefore unsafe as athletes scrape off and melt the top layer of natural snow over the course of a competitive day.

The athletes know the characteristics of the different snow mixtures and prepare appropriately to compete on the specific conditions they’ll face, Molotch said. And they likely have plenty of opportunities to practice on artificial snow.

“Ski resorts across the world rely heavily on artificial snow early in the snow season,” Molotch said. “And depending on where you are in the world, they may rely on it throughout the entire ski season.”

The Sport Ecology Group report estimates that 95% of ski resorts globally rely on snowmaking to some extent. The resorts use their artificial snow to ensure good quality conditions, prolong the ski season, or both.

One major issue with artificial snow is that it’s incredibly water-intensive to create. That’s why the Beijing Organizing Committee dedicated an entire section of their sustainability report to mitigating its impact on the local water supply. This includes its adoption of a “smart snowmaking system” that can be monitored in real-time with digital devices. The Beijing Organizing Committee believes it can save up to 20% of water in snowmaking by using this system.

The need for artificial snow might continue into future Winter Olympics because of climate change, according to the Sport Ecology Group report. A [study](#) published in Jan. 2022 led by researchers from the University of Waterloo in Canada predicted that in the event of high levels of fossil fuel emissions, only four of the past 21 Winter Olympic host cities, including Beijing, will make for reliable winter host locations by 2050 because of poor natural snow conditions.

The researchers believe just one host city — Sapporo, Japan — will still be a reliable host of the Winter Olympics by the end of the century.

HEADLINE	02/04 Nooksack Tribe demands UN retraction
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/community/facing-race/united-nations-halt-evictions-disenrolled-nooksack-members/281-acfcfeac-bee7-4df1-afbc-60b8e8298b3a
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The Nooksack Indian Tribe is demanding a retraction from the United Nation High Commissioner after the UN issued a statement calling on the tribe to halt evictions of some disenrolled members from tribe land.</p> <p>An investigation by the Bureau of Indian Affairs found the tribe followed their own procedures and process for removing tenants from tribal housing. BIA also found the tribe complied with Indian Civil Rights Act due process requirements for evicting eight tenants from low-income rental housing owned by the Nooksack.</p> <p>The UN previously alleged the tribe was in the process of evicting 63 disenrolled Nooksack members living on tribal land. On Thursday, the UN had called on the United States to “halt” what they call “imminent forced evictions” of former Nooksack indigenous tribe members.</p> <p>Federal intervention in indigenous matters is rare in the United States given the notion of tribal sovereignty. The constitution grants federally recognized Indian tribes the right to regulate internal affairs.</p> <p>Thursday’s notice was prepared by three United Nations High Commissioners on Human Rights experts and, according to the UN, may be the first diplomatic action on record to address potential Indigenous human rights violations in the U.S.</p> <p>In a statement, the tribe called the UN’s investigation “riddled with falsehoods,” and accused members of failing “to conduct even the most cursory investigation.”</p> <p>According to the tribe, the UN did not contact them before issuing the statement.</p> <p>The eight tenants facing eviction were notified they were disenrolled during the summer of 2021, according to a statement from the tribe. In October, the tenants were sent notices of termination. According to the BIA investigation, some tenants are awaiting dates for resolution or grievance hearings with the Nooksack Housing Director and Housing Committee, respectively.</p> <p>“We have 60 Nooksack families on a waiting list for housing, and some are homeless,” said Nooksack Chairman Ross Cline Sr. “Like most governments, we don’t have extra housing for non-citizens. We have homeless people, including elders, who need a place to live and we need those who aren’t Nooksack to move. Under the rules, they don’t qualify for housing. We believe that sufficient time has passed for them to make other arrangements. I encourage them to ignore their attorney’s ill-advised recommendation to fight eviction and to work to find new housing. We cannot wait forever while our people need housing.”</p> <p>The tribe alleged the UN was misled by a lawyer for some former Nooksack members who were disenrolled from the tribe in 2013. In total, over 300 citizens were disenrolled after leadership claimed that a Canadian ancestor from the 19th century wasn't a legal Nooksack; therefore her relatives aren't eligible to enroll in the tribe.</p> <p>Santana Rabang refers to herself as a disenrolled member of the Nooksack Tribe and was a teenager when this process started nearly a decade ago. Rabang has lost her tribal benefits and so have the elders.</p> <p>“They’re using the fact that our ancestral name wasn’t listed on a colonial document from 1942. That’s the main excuse that they’re using that we’re not Indigenous,” Rabang said.</p> <p>The tribe claimed any of the disenrolled members could regain their citizenship at any time, providing they present proof of lineage to the tribe’s enrollment office.</p> <p>The tribe placed blame with a lawyer for the group, who refer to themselves as the Nooksack 306, for misleading UN leaders about the situation.</p>

	<p>The group's lawyer, Gabe Galanda, alleged the group represents rightful members of the Nooksack tribe.</p> <p>“If the 306 don’t belong, there is nobody who is Nooksack that belongs. That’s what the powers that be are flirting with,” Galanda previously told KING 5.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/04 Tacoma clearing I-705 homeless camp
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/tacoma-begins-clearing-encampment-under-i-705/E4YONNYNRNERPGZZKYYSJ2NJXU/
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. — The cleanup began at a South Sound homeless encampment underneath Interstate 705, and it’s coming none too soon for nearby businesses.</p> <p>Workers began dismantling dozens of tents beneath I-705 in Tacoma this Friday morning. Last week, the city declared the encampment an “imminent threat to public safety,” but businesses directly across from it say it was left in place far too long.</p> <p>Workers began making a dent in clearing out the encampment, but Tacoma officials predict it will take at least a week to fully remove the encampment.</p> <p>The operation has raised the hopes of nearby businesses that the encampment will soon be gone, but there is plenty of skepticism, too.</p> <p>“There was a rock and there was glass shattered inside the building,” said Todd Foster, a 15-year employee at Eagle Truck & Automotive.</p> <p>He says this has been his work life for months, across from the encampment underneath I-705.</p> <p>“This happened when we were closed,” Foster said. “They just broke the window, just to break it. Just to do, I don’t know, because that’s what they do.”</p> <p>On this overcast Friday, the city of Tacoma was dismantling the encampment he believes is the source of their troubles.</p> <p>Even before city workers could arrive, however, at least two fires broke out, a reminder of the safety threat the encampment posed. So late last week, the city posted notices telling the 60 to 80 people they believe live here that this was going away.</p> <p>When asked where she will sleep Friday night, encampment resident Edilyn Domenden answered, “(I) have no clue.”</p> <p>She says she has been homeless for nearly 20 years.</p> <p>“Now with this going on, trying to chase us out of our home is another biggest trauma we’re all going to have to deal with again,” she said. “And I told everybody, ‘Enough is enough.’ How many more moves do we have?”</p> <p>Allyson Griffith, the assistant director for Tacoma Neighborhood and Community Services, says they are offering shelter.</p> <p>“I like we were very constrained in terms of overall shelter space in the community,” Griffith said. “We don’t generally see 100% uptake at any particular encampment, but we’d be right about at our shelter capacity.”</p> <p>“I’m very grateful they’re doing this,” said Foster. “But when it’s cleaned up and things change, then I’ll believe it.”</p>

	<p>He is doubtful because he says he can already see people who were living here moving behind his business.</p> <p>The city says clearing out the encampment is a process that will last at least another week, maybe longer.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/04 Seattle crime spikes; mayor pledges fix
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/they-are-destroying-fabric-our-neighborhood-seattle-crime-spikes-mayor-pledges-fix/A7EWJB232ZC3ZF2ADZHBIRCUEU/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — New 2021 data from the Seattle Police Department shows crime in Seattle is up — way up. The increases are nearly across the board, ranging from shootings to robberies to property crime.</p> <p>Seattle’s new mayor, Bruce Harrell, says his office is working as fast as possible to turn things around, and shared some of the city’s plans to do that Friday morning.</p> <p>“We will not look the other way when people are engaging in disruptive behavior committing crimes. They are destroying the fabric of our neighborhood,” Harrell said.</p> <p>Numbers from SPD show that in 2021 compared to 2020:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property crime increased 9%. • Shootings and shots fired increased 40%, an all-time high for Seattle. • Violent crime overall is up 20%; robberies and aggravated assaults are up, while homicide and rape are down. <p>“When I see what I see what I continue to see out here, I can’t sleep at night,” Harrell said.</p> <p>Blake Richardson works in downtown Seattle.</p> <p>“It’s just crazy. There was a gunshot the other day, and I was on my break and going to get a cup of coffee,” Richardson said.</p> <p>A man was shot just a couple of blocks from Seattle’s iconic Pike Place Market in the middle of the afternoon on Jan. 19.</p> <p>Near First Avenue and Pike Street, multiple stores have windows boarded up. Sneaker City is closing, moving to online only because of increased rent and crime.</p> <p>Seattle Shirt Company says break-ins have been rampant. A manager said on Friday that the store has been targeted seven times in the last three months.</p> <p>Seattle police say the downtown Seattle Target store has called 911 a total of 659 times in 2021.</p> <p>Sock Harbor across the street hasn’t been hit nearly as hard, but the business is certainly not spared.</p> <p>“Seen an increase in drug use and people coming in trying to support that by stealing items,” said David Woodley, manager at Sock Harbor.</p> <p>Some Seattle businesses like “A Bit of Taste,” an olive oil company in Queen Anne, say crime is pushing them out of the city. The store plans to relocate to Snohomish.</p> <p>Harrell is renewing his promises to bring changes.</p> <p>“We will not tolerate organized retail theft that’s become rampant in our city, that’s causing businesses to close and leave,” Harrell said.</p>

	<p>He says in his first month as mayor, he has directed SPD to focus on the places where crime is most concentrated.</p> <p>One area getting attention is 12th Avenue South and South Jackson Street in Little Saigon.</p> <p>Harrell said in the first three weeks of January, police have made 37 arrests from this area, 23 of them felony arrests.</p> <p>The mayor also pledged more housing and help coming for the unsheltered, and people suffering from substance abuse.</p> <p>Senior Deputy Mayor Monisha Harrell said the city is also aggressively seeking more resources from the state and federal governments.</p> <p>“The one thing that should be very clear with this team is we understand the holistic approach of what it’s going to take to bring public safety to the city of Seattle,” Harrell said. “What are the other avenues we’ll be taking to ensure we’re not taking every single problem and throwing it on our police department, and spilling that to our fire department,” she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/04 WSP promotes first woman assistant chief
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/washington-state-patrol-promotes-a-woman-to-assistant-chief-for-first-time-in-agencys-history
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA - For the first time in Washington State Patrol history, a woman is now the assistant chief. Shannon Bendiksen was promoted to the position in June 2021, and Chief John Batiste's hosted a promotional ceremony on Feb. 2.</p> <p>"I'm very proud and very humbled. I've worked really hard through my entire life, I'm super competitive," said Bendiksen. "Every time I put in a new badge or new insignia, it's a pretty powerful experience."</p> <p>Bendiksen has been climbing the ranks in her 22 years with WSP. She said it is an honor to serve as the first female assistant chief in the agency's 100-year history.</p> <p>"I have mixed emotions on it. I feel like there's a lot of pressure because I'm the one and only ever, so far. So, there's a lot of eyes on me. But I'm also confident. The chief—he put me in positions over the course of five, six years because he has faith in me," said Bendiksen.</p> <p>She said her previous roles as Captain of the Training Division and Motor Carrier Division was a high point in her career. These were positions not many women held at WSP. However, she said her competitive edge helped her break those barriers and step up as a leader.</p> <p>"If you don't see somebody in those positions that's like you, it's very difficult to envision yourself being in those positions," said Bendiksen.</p> <p>Though representation is important to Bendiksen, she said diversity is underrepresented within the agency. WSP's latest numbers show 86% of troopers are white, most of them men. Bendiksen said lack of diversity is happening within other state patrols in the U.S.</p> <p>"Our situation is not unique. Everybody across the nation is struggling with: how do we get more women, people of color, more diversity into our organization? Because we're so traditional and so cultural and it's just really difficult to break through that," said Bendiksen.</p>

	<p>As assistant chief, she will be head six divisions including human resources' newly established Office of Equity. She said the office is aggressively ramping up recruiting efforts to engage women and people of color.</p> <p>"When we're looking to our future and the need to be more diverse as a law enforcement agency -- both in reflecting our community, but as well as being inclusive of all different types of people and personalities and perspectives -- we want people to join our agency that have that vision and can help us move in that direction," said Bendiksen.</p> <p>While honoring the past of Washington State Patrol, the history maker is dedicating her work towards the agency's inclusive future.</p> <p>"As intimidated as I am, I'm just embracing it and I'm just going to do the best job that I can. And if it inspires somebody then that makes it all the better," said Bendiksen.</p> <p>The assistant chief was a teacher after playing college basketball on a full ride scholarship. She transitioned to law enforcement after an invite to participate in a ride-along with Olympia Police Department. She then followed the footsteps of her uncle who was a sergeant at WSP. Bendiksen is a wife and mother of three and her husband also works for state patrol.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/04 Concrete workers' strike, thousands laid off
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/thousands-of-trade-workers-laid-off-more-to-come-following-concrete-worker-strike
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - The fight for wage increases for concrete workers started three months ago, but as the strike continues, Washingtonians are seeing and feeling the effects it's having.</p> <p>Thousands are being laid off work as more construction sites come to a halt due to the ongoing concrete worker strike.</p> <p>"It's our battle flag at this point," said 35-year-old Bryan Schwartz, who has been in the industry for eight years. "My whole livelihood is at stake."</p> <p>Schwartz has been protesting daily outside his employer.</p> <p>He's not the only one struggling-- William Baker, a concrete mixer driver, said he's facing hard times just like everyone else.</p> <p>"Robbing Peter to pay Paul with our bills," Baker explained.</p> <p>Some of these concrete mixer drivers have been on strike since mid-November.</p> <p>They walked off jobs at Cadman, CalPortland/Glacier Northwest, Salmon Bay Sand & Gravel, Lehigh Cement, Stoneway Concrete and Gary Molino.</p> <p>According to Teamsters Local 174, several major projects around the Sound have come to a halt.</p> <p>"Sound Transit, Microsoft Redmond campus modernization, work on the convention center, all manner of skyscrapers going up downtown, where there's nothing happening right now," Director of Communications and Research for Teamsters Local 174, Jamie Fleming said.</p> <p>"You can't build the next floor without the first floor being built with concrete," Baker said.</p> <p>Carpenters on strike Carpenters around our area are on strike, picketing for better pay, health, welfare and pensions.</p>

Joshua Viramontes, a concrete mixer driver who's been in the industry for six years, said it's all about teamwork.

"One hand washes the other, so if one trade is out for a certain amount of time, it stops everything," Viramontes said.

An impact Executive Secretary of the Seattle Building Trades Monty Anderson says is growing daily.

As these men and women continue their strike it's impacting all construction trades, cement masons, ironworkers, laborers, carpenters and as the schedule gets pushed further behind electricians, plumbers and roofers will all be hit hard too.

"We're in the thousands of workers now that are out of work because of this," Anderson said.

Anderson says another 450 construction trade employees were laid off Friday morning, not including another 5,000 to 6,000 trade workers who are currently not working because of the strike.

FOX 13 asked how many more people are at risk of being laid off or losing their job because of the concrete worker strike.

"I'd say easily another 8,000 in the next month," Anderson said.

"It's rough to see people having to suffer for our fight," Baker said.

Many of the workers have friends and family working in the other trades who are now sitting at home wondering when they will be called in.

The concrete workers say all they want is what's fair.

"We've fallen behind in the past, we just can't keep falling further behind," Schwartz said.

As they protest, many of you honk as you drive past, showing your support.

The concrete workers say it's what keeps them from backing down.

Burien Councilman and Ahora Construction Owner, Jimmy Matta, stopped by one of the demonstrations to show his support despite being hit hard too.

"They're worth what, what they're asking for," Matta said.

He's laid off several of his own employees shrinking his team from 88 to just two trade workers.

But it's not just trade workers and businesses being impacted, but you – taxpayers.

"In the end, it's the people that work for a living and as taxpayers are footing the bill," Anderson said.

It's a fight workers want resolved, fast.

"Just bargain with us," Schwartz asked of the companies. "Everybody wants to go back to work."

FOX 13 reached out to the six companies involved, the spokesperson representing five of them sent us the statement they shared previously but declined to comment today.

"Glacier Northwest, Stoneway Concrete, Salmon Bay Sand & Gravel and Cadman, Inc. have provided the Teamsters with the best package we have ever offered which includes a 17.6% pay increase over the next

three years, improves pension contributions, provides excellent medical benefits, and a generous retiree medical insurance rarely found in other labor contracts.

Mediation occurred on January 20, 2022, with the FMCS and concluded at the end of the day at the direction of FMCS without a resolution. The Companies remain committed to the FMCS process as the best way to reach an agreement. A follow-up meeting has yet to be scheduled."

We also reached out to Sound Transit and Microsoft regarding the projects who said they had no comment at the time.

The Seattle Building Trades says they anticipate another thousand employees to be laid off on Monday.

A number that can keep growing even if concrete workers return to work tomorrow – the backlog in projects is increasing by the day.

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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	02/07 UN experts: NKorea stole \$400M in attacks
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/technology-business-global-trade-united-nations-north-korea-25b1c7199519b31fe592dace54e119d9
GIST	<p>UNITED NATIONS (AP) — North Korea is continuing to steal hundreds of millions of dollars from financial institutions and cryptocurrency firms and exchanges, illicit money that is an important source of funding for its nuclear and missile programs, U.N. experts said in a report quoting cyber specialists.</p> <p>The panel of experts said that according to an unnamed government, North Korean “cyber-actors stole more than \$50 million between 2020 and mid-2021 from at least three cryptocurrency exchanges in North America, Europe and Asia, probably reflecting a shift to diversify its cybercrime operations.”</p> <p>And the experts said in the report’s section on cyber activities obtained Sunday by The Associated Press that an unidentified cybersecurity firm reported that in 2021 the North’s “cyber-actors stole a total of \$400 million worth of cryptocurrency through seven intrusions into cryptocurrency exchanges and investment firms.”</p> <p>These cyberattacks “made use of phishing lures, code exploits, malware, and advanced social engineering to siphon funds out of these organizations’ internet-connected ‘hot’ wallets into DPRK-controlled addresses,” the panel said, using the initials of the country’s official name, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.</p> <p>The cryptocurrency funds stolen by the DPRK cyber actors “go through a careful money laundering process in order to be cashed out,” the panel of experts monitoring sanctions on North Korea said in the report to the U.N. Security Council.</p> <p>A year ago, the panel quoted an unidentified country saying North Korea’s “total theft of virtual assets from 2019 to November 2020 is valued at approximately \$316.4 million.”</p> <p>In the executive summary of the new report, the experts said North Korea has continued to develop its nuclear and ballistic missile programs.</p> <p>“Although no nuclear tests or launches of ICBMs were reported, DPRK continued to develop its capability for production of nuclear fissile materials,” the panel said. Those fissile materials — uranium or plutonium — are crucial for a nuclear reaction.</p>

The experts noted “a marked acceleration” of North Korean missile launches through January that used a variety of technology and weapons. The experts said North Korea “continued to seek material, technology and know-how for these programs overseas, including through cyber means and joint scientific research.”

A year ago, the panel said North Korea had modernized its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles by flaunting United Nations sanctions, using cyberattacks to help finance its programs and continuing to seek material and technology overseas for its arsenal including in Iran.

“Cyberattacks, particularly on cryptocurrency assets, remain an important revenue source” for Kim Jong Un’s government, the experts monitoring the implementation of sanctions against the North said in the new report.

In addition to its recent launches, North Korea has threatened to lift its four-year moratorium on more serious weapons tests such as nuclear explosions and launches of intercontinental ballistic missiles.

The Security Council initially imposed sanctions on North Korea after its first nuclear test explosion in 2006 and toughened them in response to further nuclear tests and the country’s increasingly sophisticated nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

The panel of experts said North Korea’s blockade aimed at preventing COVID-19 resulted in “historically low levels” of people and goods entering and leaving the country. Legal and illegal trade including in luxury goods “has largely ceased” though cross-border rail traffic resumed in early January, it said.

The panel has previously made clear that North Korea remains able to evade sanctions and to illicitly import refined petroleum, access international banking channels and carry out “malicious cyber activities.”

U.N. sanctions ban North Korean coal exports and the experts said in the new report that although coal exports by sea increased in the second half of 2021, “they were still at relatively low levels.”

“The quantity of illicit imports of refined petroleum increased sharply in the same period, but at a much lower level than in previous years,” the panel said, adding that direct deliveries by non-North Korea tankers has ceased and only tankers from the North delivered oil, “a marked change of methodology” probably in response to COVID-19 measures.

The experts said North Korea also continues to evade maritime sanctions “by deliberately obfuscated financial and ownership networks.”

While the humanitarian situation in the country continues to worsen, the panel said the almost complete lack of information from the country makes it difficult to determine the “unintended humanitarian consequences of U.N. sanctions affecting the civilian population.”

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HEADLINE	02/07 Crypto's boom beyond bitcoin
SOURCE	https://dnyuz.com/2022/02/07/they-made-millions-on-luna-solana-and-polygon-cryptos-boom-beyond-bitcoin/
GIST	<p>Etienne vantKruys, a globe-trotting cryptocurrency investor from Amsterdam, was hunting for a new investment two summers ago when he met some early backers of Luna, a digital coin that offers a framework for decentralized finance. Impressed by their commitment to the project, he bought \$25,000 of Luna for 20 to 35 cents a coin.</p> <p>These days, despite a recent fall in cryptocurrency prices, the value of a Luna coin is up to around \$50. Mr. vantKruys’ original investment? It’s now worth about \$5 million on paper.</p> <p>“Dude, man,” he said on a recent call, “we’re in some happy country.”</p>

You have probably heard of Bitcoin, Ether and even [Dogecoin millionaires](#). But over the past two years, their ranks have rapidly expanded, as speculators recorded huge profits from more obscure cryptocurrency projects, some with names that sound cribbed from a children's cartoon. Now there are Solana millionaires, Luna millionaires, Polygon millionaires.

Even after the drop in cryptocurrency prices dampened some of the hype, the gains remain staggering. The value of Solana, a cryptocurrency platform that provides an alternative to Ethereum, has grown by more than 6,000 percent since January 2021. The price of Cardano, another crypto platform with its own currency, is up 500 percent.

The wealth generated by these coins shows how widespread the cryptocurrency phenomenon has become. More than 11,000 digital currencies exist, and anybody can create one with a bit of coding. Some of the coins are tied to complex "DeFi" projects, which offer decentralized borrowing and lending options, while others serve as currency in video games like Axie Infinity. These currencies, usually created for some kind of practical application, are distinct from meme coins like Dogecoin, a joke currency that [soared in value](#) last year.

"Every type of financial service is now being replicated in these decentralized environments," said Stephen McKeon, a cryptocurrency expert at the University of Oregon. "This is what's driving all the investment."

The investors profiting from obscure coins come from a variety of backgrounds. There are industry aficionados who had already made money on Bitcoin and Ether, and newcomers who have notched impressive gains practically overnight.

In interviews, members of this new class of crypto millionaires said they were still figuring out what to do with their growing wealth. Some have made splashy purchases, renting fancy apartments or partying in foreign countries.

Others have relocated to tax havens like [Puerto Rico](#) or quit their day jobs as they plowed even more money into an ever-expanding set of tokens.

In January, Cal Graham, 28, a British cryptocurrency speculator, invested \$200,000 in a new token called LooksRare, which is part of a trading platform for the unique digital collectibles known as NFTs, or [nonfungible tokens](#). He sold all his LooksRare holdings less than two weeks later, walking away with nearly \$500,000 in profits.

Mr. Graham, who lives in a luxury apartment in London, became a crypto millionaire through his investment in Ether, the second-most-valuable digital currency behind Bitcoin. He said he had made at least \$1 million more by trading lesser-known currencies like LooksRare.

"I'm a simple man, I like simple pleasures," he said. "I will be buying myself an expensive car and an expensive Rolex at some point."

A former human resources officer, Mr. Graham described himself as "semiretired," with a daily routine that often consists of several hours of intensive [tweeting](#) (he doles out market analysis to his 90,000 followers), boxing practice at the local gym and movies in the evening. Eventually, he plans to funnel his LooksRare profits back into the cryptocurrency market.

But as some people mint millions from little-known cryptocurrencies, others have seen impressive gains disappear overnight. For every Solana or Luna, there's an out-of-the-way token that shoots up in value, only for its price to collapse. Some of these projects are scams, or what industry experts call "rug pulls," in which someone aggressively markets a coin, then immediately liquidates the holdings, leaving investors with major losses.

“There’s too many pockets of froth that lure a lot of people who are just getting crushed and duped,” said Ed Moya, a cryptocurrency analyst at the trading company OANDA. “You have a lot of social media influencers that are pumping up certain coins that are worthless.”

Even paper gains from a successful investment in a legitimate coin can turn out to be just that: paper gains. That’s because it’s difficult and labor-intensive to convert large amounts of cryptocurrencies into dollars. Some little-known coins are unavailable on mainstream exchanges like Coinbase, meaning they first have to be converted into a better-known cryptocurrency, like Ether or Bitcoin, said Philip Gradwell, the chief economist at the crypto tracking firm Chainalysis.

A sudden conversion of a large amount of cryptocurrency can also be dangerous, causing the price of the coin to collapse as it’s turned into dollars.

“You cannot ever just get all out, or get your money out with immediate effect,” said Adrian Zdunczyk, a former musician who trades digital currencies full time from his home in Warsaw. “You’d just dampen the market or crush the market. It doesn’t work in your favor.”

Mr. Zdunczyk, 28, said he had made several million dollars from his crypto investments, more than half from obscure coins. Once, he said, he recorded profits of \$150,000 in two days after buying e-Radix, a token for DeFi projects. To avoid a drop in prices, he has learned to withdraw only a small portion of his profits at a time, while keeping the rest in the crypto market.

Mr. Zdunczyk has used some of his new income to help his parents pay off their debts, and he recently donated \$15,000 to a parrot sanctuary in Arizona. He also has three parrots of his own. “I found an amazing love,” he said. “Beautiful creatures.”

Mr. Zdunczyk has steered some of his other profits into less volatile investments, like real estate and even gold, which Bitcoin was specifically intended to replace. “I’m a huge fan of commodities,” he said.

Some of the new crypto millionaires have found more sophisticated ways to protect their wealth, joining earlier generations of wealthy Bitcoin investors in offshore tax havens like St. Kitts and Nevis.

“They say, ‘Why do I need to be a U.S. citizen, what’s the benefit?’” said Armand Tannous, a wealth management executive who advises crypto investors seeking citizenship in other countries. “‘I’m a global citizen, I don’t need to live in the U.S. anymore, I don’t need to pay taxes anymore.’”

Brenda Gentry, 46, a cryptocurrency speculator from San Antonio, said she started buying Bitcoin in 2020 before switching her focus to lesser-known tokens like Bund, which is tied to a decentralized sports-betting network. Ms. Gentry’s Bund trades netted her around \$400,000 in profits, she said, and her total portfolio is now in the mid-six figures, after taking a hit from the recent drop in prices.

“It’s like a child walking into a candy store,” Ms. Gentry said, noting that she can buy one token, then convert it into another, and then another.

On top of her cryptocurrency investments, Ms. Gentry, a former mortgage underwriter, has found work as a consultant advising DeFi and NFT projects. She’s planning to use her cryptocurrency income to buy an acre in San Antonio. She wants to build a house, with a [crypto mining operation](#) in a storage unit next door.

Many people who have gotten wealthy through little-known cryptocurrencies said they didn’t plan to cash out. They said they preferred to [HODL](#), or hold on for dear life, and keep speculating.

Consider Mr. vantKruys, the Luna investor. He said he recently used about \$1 million of his cryptocurrency holdings to buy a house for a loved one. But he has no interest in selling his stash of Luna, despite market volatility that led to a drop from \$99 to below \$50 per coin between December and January.

	<p>“My idea is Luna is going to be \$500 in five years,” said Mr. vantKruys, who is 45. “That’s the horizon we’re playing with.”</p> <p>Recently, he has become fixated on another obscure token, Pocket Network, that offers digital infrastructure for a range of blockchain initiatives. (Mr. vantKruys, the managing partner at the crypto fund TRGC, is an adviser on the Pocket Network project.)</p> <p>Mr. vantKruys once heard about a Dutch investor who had sold his house to make a huge Bitcoin purchase. At the time, he said, he thought the man was insane, but now he’s contemplating a similarly substantial investment in Pocket Network.</p> <p>“My dude, it’s just the first crypto where I’ll probably do something crazy,” he said. “You’re at the poker table — you’re like, all in.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/07 Europol flags online terrorist content
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/european-police-500-terrorist/
GIST	<p>European police have found and referred 563 pieces of terrorist content to service providers in the region, as a UK man was jailed for sharing a bomb-making manual online.</p> <p>The Referral Action Day took place last week at Europol’s headquarters. The EU’s Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU) coordinated the referral activity with specialized counter-terrorism units from France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and the UK.</p> <p>In particular, they were looking for content on “explosive chemical precursors” being shared online by terrorist-supporting networks, including jihadists. This refers to content such as bomb-making tutorials and information on carrying out terrorist attacks.</p> <p>The content found on 106 websites and platforms will now be assessed by the relevant online service providers against their terms and conditions.</p> <p>Last November, over 20 websites in Germany and the UK were suspended by service providers for disseminating online terrorist propaganda – fewer than half the number of sites originally flagged by police.</p> <p>However, a new EU regulation will soon give the authorities the power to demand the removal of online terrorist content.</p> <p>The news comes after a 19-year-old UK man was sentenced to 42 months in jail for sharing a bomb-making manual on social media.</p> <p>Connor Burke, from southeast London, pleaded guilty at Woolwich Crown Court to disseminating a terrorist publication that contained information on how to create improvised explosive devices (IEDs). He also pleaded guilty to four counts of possession of a document “likely to be useful” to a would-be terrorist.</p> <p>“Burke had an unhealthy interest in extreme right-wing terrorist ideology, and this led to him sharing extremely dangerous material with others online,” argued Richard Smith, head of the Metropolitan Police’s Counter Terrorism Command.</p> <p>“Increasingly, we’re seeing young people being drawn into extremist ideologies, some of whom – like Burke – then go on to commit serious terrorism offenses.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/07 Crypto firm Meter loses \$4.4M in heist
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SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/crypto-firm-meter-44m-cyber-heist/
GIST	<p>Yet another cryptocurrency firm has been hacked to the tune of millions of dollars.</p> <p>Meter provides decentralized finance (DeFi) infrastructure services, linking siloed blockchains for users with so-called “cross-chain bridges.”</p> <p>Over the weekend, it revealed that an unauthorized intruder had managed to exploit a bridge vulnerability to mint a large number of Binance Coins (BNB) and wrapped Ethereum (WETH), while running down its reserves.</p> <p>After halting bridge transactions immediately, the firm investigated the source of the bug.</p> <p>“The extended code had a wrong trust assumption which allowed hacker to call the underlying ERC20 deposit function to fake an BNB or ETH transfer,” it explained on Twitter.</p> <p>“The only impacted tokens were native gas tokens (WETH and BNB), and only Meter and Moonriver networks were impacted.”</p> <p>Meter admitted it lost \$4.4m in the raid but said it would compensate those affected while working with the authorities to trace its attacker.</p> <p>“We urge all the liquidity providers that provide liquidity involving WETH and BNB to remove liquidity from the pool and wait for an additional announcement from the Meter team,” it added. “Please try avoid trading in these pairs as well.”</p> <p>Meter urged the hacker to return the funds but has not publicly offered its assailant a bug bounty reward for their safe return, as did two other crypto firms compromised last week.</p> <p>DeFi provider Quibit Finance proffered a reward of \$2m to its attackers and a promise not to press charges after they made off with \$80m.</p> <p>Then a few days later, another cross-chain bridge provider, Wormhole, lost an estimated \$322m after attackers stole 120,000 ETH. This time it offered a staggering \$10m to the hacker.</p> <p>A few days later, proprietary trading firm Jump Trading said it replenished those funds “to make community members whole and support Wormhole now as it continues to develop.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/05 LockBit claims PayBito crypto as victim
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/lockbit-ransomware-paybito-crypto-exchange-hack/
GIST	<p>The infamous LockBit ransomware gang is claiming to have hacked PayBito, a global cryptocurrency exchange, and stolen its data including a database with 100,000 customers’ information.</p> <p>The group claimed the attack on Thursday, February 3rd on its official website on the so-called dark web accessible through the Tor browser. In its post, the operators of LockBit ransomware stated the stolen database contains personal information of customers in the United States and other countries worldwide.</p> <p>It further claimed that the stolen records have email addresses and a “weak hash algorithm” referring to a password algorithm that can be easily decrypted into cleartext format. Additionally, the alleged data includes the personal data of the exchange’s administrators.</p> <p>It is worth noting that the PayBito exchange offers buying, selling, and trading of Bitcoin, Ether, Bitcoin Cash, Litecoin, and several other cryptocurrencies. The exchange is managed by HashCash, a Palo Alto, California-based global blockchain and IT services company.</p>

Threat intelligence feeds like Dark Tracer and Dark Feed have also tweeted ([1](#) & [2](#)) about the alleged ransomware attack on PayBito. Nevertheless, the bad news is that LockBit plans to publish the alleged stolen records on February 21st, 2022 if their demand for ransom is not met.

History of LockBit ransomware gang

Like other ransomware gangs, LockBit's modus operandi involves blocking victims' access to computer systems in exchange for a ransom payment. LockBit, which itself is a malicious software, automatically vets for valuable targets, spreads the infection, and encrypts all accessible computer systems on a network.

The Lockbit ransomware gang emerged on the threat spectrum back in September 2019 and made waves in June 2021 after launching LockBit 2.0 and recruiting new partners. The gang claims to offer the "fastest data exfiltration on the market through StealBit," noted Emsisoft in the gang's [profile](#).

StealBit is a data stealer that can download 100 GB of data from an infected system within 20 minutes. Some of the gang's previous victims include [Bangkok Airways](#), [Accenture](#), [Businesses in Europe](#), and [French Ministry of Justice](#), etc.

As for the alleged ransomware attack on PayBito, at the time of publishing this article, the exchange or HashCash had not released any statement to address the issue. However, Hackread.com has contacted the company and this article will be updated based on their confirmation or denial.

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HEADLINE	02/06 Ransomware gangs narrow target scope
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/law-enforcement-action-push-ransomware-gangs-to-surgical-attacks/
GIST	<p>The numerous law enforcement operations leading to the arrests and takedown of ransomware operations in 2021 have forced threat actors to narrow their targeting scope and maximize the efficiency of their operations.</p> <p>Most of the notorious Ransomware-as-a-Service (RaaS) gangs continue their operations even after the law enforcement authorities have arrested key members but have refined their tactics for maximum impact.</p> <p>Shift in victimology</p> <p>According to an analysis published by Coveware, which looks at ransom negotiation data from Q4 2021, ransomware groups now demand higher ransom payments instead of increasing the volume of their attacks.</p> <p>In numbers, the average ransom payment in Q4 2021 reached \$322,168, which is 130% higher compared to the previous quarter. The median ransom payment amount was \$117,116, up 63% compared to Q3.</p> <p>Because disrupting the operation of large firms provokes investigations and creates political tensions on the international level, crooks are now striving for a delicate balance.</p> <p>They target large enough firms to receive hefty ransom payment demands but not that big or critical that will cause them more geopolitical troubles than gains.</p> <p>When looking at the company size in terms of employee count, entities with over 50,000 employees experienced fewer incidents as threat actors chose to focus more on mid-sized organizations.</p> <p>"Although medium and large organizations continue to be impacted, ransomware remains a small business problem with 82% of attacks impacting organizations with less than one thousand employees," explains Coveware</p> <p>Group tactics and activity</p>

In Q4 2021, the most frequently encountered variant was Conti, accounting for 19.4% of all detections, LockBit 2.0 came second with 16.3%, and Hive third with 9.2%.

Considering that the top three ransomware operations engage in double-extortion tactics, it is no surprise that 84% of all attacks in Q4 2021 involved stolen data too.

This percentage would be even higher if it relied only upon the actors' intentions, as in some cases, the attacks are detected and stopped by defense systems prematurely.

In terms of the techniques and procedures (TTPs), Coveware reports the following:

- Establishing **persistence** through scheduled tasks and startup code execution characterized 82% of the infections.
- The actors performed **lateral movement** in 82% of ransomware attacks, attempting to pivot to more systems on the same network.
- **Credential access** underpinned 71% of the observed ransomware cases.
- A **command and control** center orchestrating remote access operations was used in 63% of the incidents.
- **Gathering data** such as keyboard inputs, screenshots, emails, video, and other espionage-related information characterized 61% of the cases.

Another notable change in the tactics concerns the initial compromise vector. RDP access which used to be a widely-bartered item on dark web markets, is steadily dropping as ransomware actors turn to exploiting vulnerabilities.

The most exploited flaws for network entry in Q4 2021 were CVE-2021-34473, CVE-2021-26855, and CVE-2018-13379, on Microsoft Exchange and Fortinet firewall appliances.

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HEADLINE	02/05 BlackCat/ALPHV linked to BlackMatter
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/blackcat-alphv-ransomware-linked-to-blackmatter-darkside-gangs/
GIST	<p>The Black Cat ransomware gang, also known as ALPHV, has confirmed they are former members of the notorious BlackMatter/DarkSide ransomware operation.</p> <p>BlackCat/ALPHV is a new feature-rich ransomware operation launched in November 2021 and developed in the Rust programming language, which is unusual for ransomware infections.</p> <p>The ransomware executable is highly customizable, with different encryption methods and options allowing for attacks on a wide range of corporate environments.</p> <p>While the ransomware gang calls themselves ALPHV, security researcher MalwareHunterTeam named the ransomware BlackCat after the image of a black cat used on every victim's Tor payment page.</p> <p>Since then, the ransomware operation has been known as BlackCat when discussed in the media or by security researchers.</p> <p>A brief history on ransomware rebrands</p> <p>Many ransomware operations are run as a Ransomware-as-a-Service (RaaS), where core members are in charge of developing the ransomware infection and managing servers, while affiliates (aka "adverts") are recruited to breach corporate networks and conduct attacks.</p> <p>As part of this arrangement, the core developers earn between 10-30% of a ransom payment, while the affiliate earns the rest. The percentages change based on how much ransom revenue a particular affiliate brings to the operation.</p>

While there have been many RaaS operations in the past, there have been a few top-tier gangs that commonly shut down when law enforcement is breathing down their neck and then rebrand under new names.

These top-tier Ransomware-as-a-Service operations and their rebrands are:

- **GandCrab to REvil:** The [GandCrab ransomware operation launched](#) in January 2018 and shut down in June 2019 after [claiming to earn \\$2 Billion in ransom payments](#). They [relaunched as REvil](#) in September 2019, which ultimately [shut down in October 2021](#) after law enforcement hijacked their infrastructure.
- **Maze to Egregor:** The [Maze ransomware began operating in May 2019](#) and [formally announced its shutdown](#) in October 2020. However, affiliates, and likely the operators, are believed to have [rebranded in September as Egregor](#), who later disappeared after [members were arrested in Ukraine](#).
- **DarkSide to BlackMatter:** The [DarkSide ransomware operation launched](#) in August 2022 and [shut down in May 2021](#) due to law enforcement operations spurred by the gang's widely publicized [attack on Colonial Pipeline](#). They [returned as BlackMatter](#) on July 31st but [soon shut down](#) in November 2021 after [Emsisoft exploited a weakness to create a decryptor](#) and servers were seized.

Some believe that Conti was a rebrand of Ryuk, but sources tell BleepingComputer that they are both discrete operations run by the TrickBot Group and are not affiliated with each other.

While some affiliates tend to partner with a single RaaS operation, it is common for affiliates and penetration testers to partner with multiple gangs at once.

For example, a ransomware affiliate told BleepingComputer that they worked with Ragnar Locker, Maze, and the REvil ransomware operations simultaneously.

BlackCat rises from BlackMatter's ashes

Since BlackCat ransomware launched in November, the representative of the LockBit ransomware gang has stated that ALPHV/BlackCat is a rebrand of DarkSide/BlackMatter.

The Record published an [interview with the ALPHV/BlackCat gang](#), who confirmed suspicions that they were affiliated with the DarkSide/BlackMatter gang.

"As adverts of darkmatter [DarkSide / BlackMatter], we suffered from the interception of victims for subsequent [decryption](#) by Emsisoft," ALPHV told The Record, referring to the [release of Emsisoft's decryptor](#).

While the BlackCat ransomware operators claim that they were only DarkSide/BlackMatter affiliates who launched their own ransomware operation, some security researchers are not buying it.

Emsisoft threat analyst [Brett Callow](#) believes BlackMatter replaced their dev team after Emsisoft exploited a weakness allowing victims to recover their files for free and losing the ransomware gang millions of dollars in ransoms.

"While Alphv claim to be former DS/BM affiliates, it's more likely that they *are* DS/BM but attempting to distance themselves from that brand due to the reputational hit it took after making an error that cost affiliates multiple millions of dollars," Callow [tweeted](#) yesterday.

In the past, it was possible to prove that different ransomware operations were related by looking for code similarities in the encryptor's code.

As the BlackCat encryptor has been built from scratch in the Rust programming language, Emsisoft's [Fabian Wosar](#) told BleepingComputer that these coding similarities no longer exist.

However, Wosar said that there are similarities in the features and configuration files, supporting that it is the same group behind the BlackCat and the DarkSide/BlackMatter ransomware operations.

Regardless of whether they are just past affiliates who decided to launch their own ransomware operation or a rebrand of DarkSide/BlackMatter, they have shown to be able to pull off large corporate attacks and are rapidly amassing victims.

BlackCat is going to be a ransomware operation that all law enforcement, network defenders, and security professionals need to keep a close eye on.

Gang repeats their mistakes

Ironically, what led to the downfall of the DarkSide/BlackMatter operations may ultimately be what causes a quick demise for BlackCat/ALPHV.

After DarkSide attacked the Colonial Pipeline, the largest fuel pipeline in the United States, it began to feel the [full pressure of international law enforcement](#) and the US government.

This pressure continued after they rebranded as BlackMatter, with law enforcement seizing their servers and causing them to shut down again.

What may have thrust the BlackCat ransomware into the spotlight is ironically another attack on oil suppliers and distribution companies, leading to supply chain issues.

This week, [BlackCat attacked Oiltanking](#), a German petrol distributor, and Mabanaft GmbH, an oil supplier. These attacks once again affected the fuel supply chain and caused gas shortages.

The BlackCat operators, though, told The Record that they could not control who their affiliates attack and ban those that are non-compliant with the gang's policies. These policies state that affiliates should not target government agencies, healthcare, or educational entities.

However, it seems that the Darkside gang didn't learn from their previous mistakes and once again attacked critical infrastructure, which will likely place them firmly in the crosshairs of law enforcement.

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HEADLINE	02/04 Swissport International hit by ransomware
SOURCE	https://securityaffairs.co/wordpress/127655/cyber-crime/swissport-international-ransomware-attack.html?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Swissport International Ltd. is an aviation services company providing airport ground, lounge hospitality and cargo handling services owned by an international group of investors. The company handles around 282 million passengers and 4.8 million tonnes of cargo annually, on behalf of some 850 client-companies in the aviation sector. With a workforce of around 66,000 personnel, Swissport is active at 307 locations in 50 countries, and generates consolidated operating revenue of EUR 2.8 billion.</p> <p>Swissport International was hit by a ransomware attack that had a severe impact on its operations causing flights to suffer delays.</p> <p>According to the German website Spiegel, the ransomware attack impacted a limited part of the company's global IT infrastructure, a company spokesman confirmed that the security breach took place on Thursday morning at 6 AM.</p> <p>The company said via Twitter that the attack has been largely contained, while it is working to resolve the issue as quickly as possible.</p> <p><i>"Due to system problems at our airport partner Swissport, 22 flights were delayed by 3 to 20 minutes yesterday," said a spokeswoman for Zurich Airport. "We are now in the process of restoring the affected systems," said a Swissport spokesman on request. "The attack has now been contained and everything is being done to solve the problem as quickly as possible and limit the impact on flight</i></p>

operations.” “Swissport can continue to provide ground services for airlines safely, but there may be delays in some cases,” added the company spokesman.

The Swissport website was not reachable on Friday afternoon.

At this time the company did not disclose details about the attack, such as the ransomware family that infected its systems or whether the attack lead to a data breach. No ransomware groups has claimed the attack on their leak sites.

Recently other attacks impacted critical infrastructure in Europe, like [the one that hit Oiltanking GmbH](#), a German petrol distributor who supplies Shell gas stations in the country, severely impacting its operations. According to the media, the attack also impacted the oil supplier Mabanft GmbH. The two companies belong to the Marquard & Bahls group.

Local media reported that the attacks could have had an impact on the fuel supply in the country. This week some of the major oil terminals in Western Europe’s biggest ports [have been targeted](#) with a cyberattack.

Among the impacted port infrastructure, there is the Amsterdam-Rotterdam-Antwerp oil trading hub, along with the SEA-Tank Terminal in Antwerp.

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HEADLINE	02/04 Russia FSB hackers hit Ukraine since Oct.
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/microsoft/microsoft-russian-fsb-hackers-hitting-ukraine-since-october/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Microsoft said today that a Russian hacking group known as Gamaredon has been behind a streak of spear-phishing emails targeting Ukrainian entities and organizations related to Ukrainian affairs since October 2021.</p> <p>Linked by Ukraine's security (SSU) and secret (SBU) services to Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), the country's domestic intelligence service, this hacking group is also tracked as Armageddon, Primitive Bear, and ACTINIUM.</p> <p>Gamaredon has been active for at least a decade and has been behind thousands of attacks on Ukrainian orgs since 2013.</p> <p>Security and threat researchers with the Microsoft Threat Intelligence Center (MSTIC) and the Microsoft Digital Security Unit (DSU) said today that Gamaredon's cyber-espionage campaign is being coordinated out of Crimea, confirming SSU's assessment that the Gamaredon hackers are officers of the Crimean FSB who sided with Russia during the 2014 occupation.</p> <p>"MSTIC has observed ACTINIUM targeting organizations in Ukraine spanning government, military, non-government organizations (NGO), judiciary, law enforcement, and non-profit, with the primary intent of exfiltrating sensitive information, maintaining access, and using acquired access to move laterally into related organizations," Microsoft added.</p> <p>"Since October 2021, ACTINIUM has targeted or compromised accounts at organizations critical to emergency response and ensuring the security of Ukrainian territory, as well as organizations that would be involved in coordinating the distribution of international and humanitarian aid to Ukraine in a crisis."</p> <p>Gamaredon is not linked to last month's cyberattacks that targeted multiple Ukraine government agencies and corporate entities with destructive data-wiping malware disguised as ransomware.</p> <p>SSU blocks 120 cyberattacks in January</p>

Palo Alto Networks' Unit 42 also [issued a report regarding this group's recent activity](#) targeting Ukraine and mentioned "an attempt to compromise a Western government entity in Ukraine on Jan. 19, 2022," via a spear-phishing attack pushing a malware downloader.

"In this attempt, rather than emailing the downloader directly to their target, the actors instead leveraged a job search and employment service within Ukraine," Unit 42 said.

"Given the steps and precision delivery involved in this campaign, it appears this may have been a specific, deliberate attempt by Gamaredon to compromise this Western government organization." The same tactics were described by [Symantec's Threat Hunter team](#), who saw Gamaredon distributing macro-laced Word documents in spear-phishing attacks that started in July 2021.

These reports confirm an advisory published by the Ukrainian Computer Emergency Response Team [warning of attacks](#) against Ukrainian authorities.

One day later, the SSU said it [blocked more than 120 cyberattacks](#) targeting the information systems of state institutions in Ukraine, including brute-force and malware attacks.

"MSTIC assesses that the primary outcome of activities by ACTINIUM is persistent access to networks of perceived value for the purpose of intelligence collection," Microsoft also said today.

"Despite seemingly wide deployment of malicious capabilities in the region, follow-on activities by the group occur in areas of discrete interest, indicating a possible review of targeting."

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HEADLINE	02/07 Attacks against health plans jump 35%
SOURCE	https://www.helpnetsecurity.com/2022/02/07/attacks-against-health-plans/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>As we entered the second year of the pandemic in 2021, healthcare systems found themselves under unprecedented and unrelenting stress. Frontline healthcare workers continued to be understaffed and overworked. Hospitals were so overcrowded that they have been forced to postpone routine medical procedures until the latest surge of COVID-19 cases subsides.</p> <p>Similarly, IT departments at healthcare organizations faced critical skills and staffing shortages as they battled the latest cyberattack variants. Today, those departments continue to be stretched so thin dealing with pandemic-related crises that routine security measures may fall by the wayside, breaches may go undetected for weeks, and efforts to validate the security measures undertaken by affiliates and third parties may fall short.</p> <p>The effects of breaches on healthcare organizations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Total individuals affected: 2021 hit a high of 45 million individuals affected by healthcare attacks, up from 34 million in 2020. That 45 million number is triple the number of individuals impacted only three years ago. (The number was 14 million in 2018)• Who is getting breached?: Attacks against health plans jumped nearly 35% from 2020 to 2021. And attacks against business associates, or third-party vendors, increased nearly 18% from 2020 to 2021. Fortunately, attacks against Healthcare Providers (where most breaches are historically reported) declined slightly after peaking in 2020 (down ~4%).• Most common breach causes: Hacking/IT incidents continue to be the most common cause of breaches with an increase of 10% in 2021. Hacking was also responsible for the vast majority of individual records that were affected by breaches, which means those records were likely sold on the Dark Web.• One thing we're watching: When we look at which segments of the healthcare ecosystem had Hacking/IT Incident type breaches, we're now seeing outpatient/specialty clinics have more Hacking/IT Incident type breaches than hospitals. Outpatient/specialty clinics saw a 41% increase in Hacking/IT Incident type breaches in 2021 compared to 2020.

“Whether the attack vector is ransomware, credential harvesting or stealing devices, the healthcare industry is a prime target for attackers to monetize PHI and sell on the Dark Web or hold an entity ransom unable to deliver patient care,” said [John Delano](#), Healthcare Cybersecurity Strategist at Critical Insight and VP at Christus Health.

“As we continue into 2022, healthcare organizations need to be on guard not only of their cybersecurity posture but also of third party vendors that have access to data and networks. We are seeing more awareness and proactive approaches to cybersecurity within this sector, but there is still a long way to go.”

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HEADLINE	02/05 FBI flash alert: LockBit ransomware
SOURCE	https://securityaffairs.co/wordpress/127675/cyber-crime/lockbit-ransomware-flash-alert.html?web_view=true
GIST	<p>The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has issued a flash alert containing technical details and indicators of compromise associated with LockBit ransomware operations.</p> <p>The LockBit ransomware gang has been active since September 2019, in June 2021 the group announced the LockBit 2.0 RaaS. Like other ransomware gangs, Lockbit 2.0 determines the system and user language settings and only targets those not matching a set list of languages that are Eastern European.</p> <p>After ransomware ads were banned on hacking forum, the LockBit operators set up their own leak site promoting the latest variant and advertising the LockBit 2.0 affiliate program.</p> <p><i>“As infection begins, Lockbit 2.0 deletes log files and shadow copies residing on disk. Lockbit 2.0 enumerates system information to include hostname, host configuration, domain information, local drive configuration, remote shares, and mounted external storage devices. Lockbit 2.0 attempts to encrypt any data saved to any local or remote device but skips files associated with core system functions.”</i> reads the flash alert. <i>“Once completed, Lockbit 2.0 deletes itself from disk and creates persistence at startup. Prior to encryption, Lockbit affiliates primarily use the Stealbit application obtained directly from the Lockbit panel to exfiltrate specific file types.”</i></p> <p>The group is very active in this period, the list of victims is very long and includes Riviana, Accenture, Wormington & Bollinger, Anasia Group, Bangkok Airways, Italian energy company ERG, Vlastuin Group, E.M.I.T. Aviation Consulting, SCIS Air Security, Peabody Properties, DATA SPEED SRL, Island independent buying group, Ministry of Justice of France, Day Lewis, Buffington Law Firm and tens of other companies worldwide.</p> <p>Ransomware operators have continuously improved the ransomware across the years by implementing new features, such as the support for Linux and VMware ESXi systems and the capability to abuse of group policies to encrypt Windows domains.</p> <p>The flash alert details a Hidden debug / Status Window which can be activated by pressing Shift + F1 during the initial infection and provides real-time information on the process, status of user data destruction and encryption.</p> <p>The FBI recommends victims avoid paying ransoms. The FBI is seeking any information about Lockbit operations that can be shared, including boundary logs showing communication to and from foreign IP addresses, a sample ransom note, communications with the threat actors, Bitcoin wallet information, the decryptor file, and/or a benign sample of an encrypted file.</p> <p><i>“The FBI encourages recipients of this document to report information concerning suspicious or criminal activity to their local FBI field office.” concludes the alert. “By reporting any related information to FBI Cyber Squads, you are assisting in sharing information that allows the FBI to track malicious actors and coordinate with private industry and the United States Government to prevent future intrusions and attacks.”</i></p>

The FBI flash alert also includes mitigations to prevent LockBit ransomware infections:

- Require all accounts with password logins (e.g., service account, admin accounts, and domain admin accounts) to have strong, unique passwords
- Require multi-factor authentication for all services to the extent possible
- Keep all operating systems and software up to date
- Remove unnecessary access to administrative shares
- Use a host-based firewall to only allow connections to administrative shares via server message block (SMB) from a limited set of administrator machines.
- Enable protected files in the Windows Operating System to prevent unauthorized changes to critical files.

To limit an adversary from learning the organization's enterprise environment, limit common system and network discovery techniques by taking the following actions:

- Segment networks to prevent the spread of ransomware
- Identify, detect, and investigate abnormal activity and potential traversal of the indicated ransomware with a networking monitoring tool
- Implement time-based access for accounts set at the admin level and higher
- Disable command-line and scripting activities and permissions
- Maintain offline backups of data, and regularly maintain backup and restoration
- Ensure all backup data is encrypted, immutable, and covers the entire organization's data infrastructure

In August, the Australian Cyber Security Centre (ACSC) [warned](#) of an escalation in [LockBit 2.0 ransomware](#) attacks against Australian organizations in multiple industry sectors starting July 2021. The Australian agency also published [2021-006: ACSC Ransomware Profile – Lockbit 2.0](#) which includes info related to the activity of the gang, such as initial access, threat activity and mitigations.

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HEADLINE	02/04 Licensed professionals exposed in breach
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/breach-at-state-licensing-agency-may-have-exposed-data-from-1000s-of-professionals/
GIST	<p>The personal information of more than a quarter-million licensed professionals may have been exposed in a breach of a Washington State Department of Licensing database, agency officials said Friday.</p> <p>The agency, which licenses around 40 categories of businesses and professionals — everything from auctioneers and private detectives to tattoo artists and real estate agents — said it temporarily shut down its online licensing system, known as POLARIS, Jan. 24 shortly after learning of “suspicious activity involving professional and occupational license data,” according to a spokesperson and a statement posted Thursday on the agency’s website.</p> <p>Data stored on POLARIS “may include Social Security numbers, birth dates, driver’s license numbers and other personally identifying information,” but the agency doesn’t yet know whether such data was actually accessed or how many individuals may have been affected, agency spokesperson Christine Anthony said in a statement Friday.</p> <p>There was also “no indication” that the incident had affected other agency data, “such as driver and vehicle licensing information,” agency officials said, adding that all other Department of Licensing systems were operating normally.</p> <p>WHAT TO DO</p> <p>If you are hit by a data breach or ID theft:</p> <p>While there is no foolproof way to ensure that your information is safe, there are some steps you can take to protect yourself from identity theft.</p>

Anthony said the agency has been working with the state Office of Cybersecurity, the state Attorney General's Office and a third-party cybersecurity firm "to fully understand the extent of the incident and take all other appropriate action" and "will release more information when we know more."

In the meantime, the shutdown of the POLARIS system is causing problems for some professionals and firms that need to apply for, renew or modify their licensing.

The disruption comes at a busy time for real estate agents, appraisers and home inspectors as the state's real estate market begins to pick up after its typical winter slowdown.

"It's a horrible time," said Reis Pearson, an inspector and president of the American Society of Home Inspectors of Washington State.

Even before the breach, the organization had struggled to get state approval for ongoing education courses that are required of inspectors, he said. That process is now likely to be delayed further, just as inspectors' work gets busier.

Steve Francks, CEO of Washington Realtors, said his members know the department is trying to "fix this problem and restore online services" as quickly as possible, but added that there is "frustration with the lack of communication ... regarding a firm plan to fix those issues." The state has roughly 40,000 licensed Realtors, according to the group.

Another possible frustration: the Department of Licensing opened a call center Friday to handle questions about the incident — 855-568-2052 — but said the center would be at limited capacity until Monday.

Officials at the Office of Cybersecurity sounded the alarm of a possible breach after detecting "chatter" about the Department of Licensing on the "dark web," said state Sen. Reuven Carlyle, D-Seattle, referring to part of the online world where users can mask their identities with special technology and where personal data stolen in data breaches is bought and sold.

Criminals often use stolen personal data to commit impostor fraud — by, for example, filing false tax returns or applying for unemployment benefits, [as happened in Washington in the spring of 2020](#).

"The issue was brought to our attention [after] someone online claimed to have accessed data," Anthony said. "Immediately we began investigating, and by the afternoon of Jan. 24, 2022, out of caution we shut down the licensing system."

But investigators have yet to conclude whether personal data was actually removed by hackers or was merely exposed, said Carlyle, chair of the environment, energy & technology committee, who was briefed by the agency earlier this week.

Only a thorough investigation can determine "whether data was accessible and whether it was accessed and if it was, what the scale of that was," Carlyle said. Until then, he said, "we just don't have an answer on that."

Some users of the site said the Department of Licensing was slow in letting licensees know what was happening. "It's frustrating that they didn't notify prospective victims sooner," a Seattle Times reader noted, adding that the POLARIS system appeared to be "under maintenance for more than a week before they sent out an email yesterday about the potential breach."

Anthony said the agency had initially posted a maintenance message because officials "hoped the issue could be resolved quickly and without impact to professional licensees." But "once we became aware that it could be a more complex issue, we changed it to 'temporarily unavailable,'" she said.

The size of the breach remains unclear. Data from 23 professions and business types licensed by the state is processed via POLARIS, Anthony said.

Within those 23 categories, which also include bail bonds agents, funeral directors, home inspectors and notaries, the agency has around 257,000 active licenses in its system, Anthony said, adding that “there are likely more records that may be identified while conducting our investigation.”

Investigators are also still trying to find the location of the breach — whether it was an internal problem at the Department of Licensing, for example, or with a vendor or other third party, Carlyle said.

“They’re not ready to make a conclusion regarding where in the ‘ecosystem’ there was a weakness,” Carlyle said.

The incident at the Department of Licensing is only the latest in a series of recent data breaches that have struck private firms, government agencies and other organizations in Washington and elsewhere.

In late 2020, [a software vendor used by the state Auditor’s Office suffered a data breach that likely led to files being accessed by “an unauthorized user,”](#) the auditor said.

In December and January alone, 25 organizations have notified around 300,000 Washingtonians that they were “at risk of harm because of the unauthorized acquisition of data that compromises the security, confidentiality, or integrity of that resident’s personal information,” [according a website at the state Attorney General’s Office.](#)

The almost-routine nature of data breaches was on the minds of many professionals in Washington as they awaited updates from the Department of Licensing.

“It’s always distressing when there’s potential security breach,” said Pearson, with the inspectors’ society. “But it feels like that’s kind of part of the daily news in our current climate.”

What to do if you are hit by a data breach or ID theft

While there is no foolproof way to ensure that your information is safe, there are some steps you can take to protect yourself from identity theft.

Call the companies where the fraud may have occurred.

Work with one of the credit bureaus (Experian, TransUnion and Equifax) to check your credit report for suspicious activity and to place a fraud alert or credit freeze on your credit report.

Report the identity theft to the [FTC at IdentityTheft.gov.](#)

File a report with your local police department.

Send a copy of the police report to the three major credit bureaus.

Ask businesses to provide you with information about transactions made in your name. A template for a letter you can complete and send to businesses to request records is available on the [Attorney General’s Office website at: https://www.atg.wa.gov/db-letter](#)

If you receive a breach notification or believe that you may be a victim of identity theft, please visit the [Washington Attorney General’s website](#) for help.

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HEADLINE	02/05 FBI geofence warrant Seattle BLM protest
SOURCE	https://www.theverge.com/2022/2/5/22918487/fbi-geofence-seattle-blm-protest-police-guild-attack
GIST	Federal investigators served Google with a geofence warrant as part of an investigation into an attempted arson against a police union headquarters in Seattle during protests of the shooting of Jacob Blake, as shown by documents unsealed today in federal court.

The attempted arson took place on August 24th, 2020, one day after police officers shot Jacob Blake in Kenosha, Wisconsin, leaving him paralyzed. Amidst broader protests in Seattle and across the country, two people threw Molotov cocktails at the rear entrance of the headquarters of the Seattle Police Officers Guild (SPOG).

While the building sustained little damage, the attack spurred widespread national interest: Seattle police initially posted a \$1,000 reward for information, and the FBI later [offered up to \\$20,000](#) for any tips that would help identify the people involved.

But [documents unsealed on February 3rd](#) show that, before offering the reward for information, the FBI also used a controversial search technique known as a geofence warrant to request information from Google about all Android devices that had passed through the area before and after the attack.

“On August 24, 2020, at approximately 11:00 p.m., two unknown suspects intentionally damaged the SPOG building using what I believe to be improvised incendiary devices,” an FBI agent told the court in the affidavit. “Based on the foregoing, I submit that there is probable cause to search information that is currently in the possession of Google and that relates to the devices that reported being within the Target Location.”

The warrant is addressed to Google and requests “Location History data, sourced from information including GPS data and information about visible wi-fi points and Bluetooth beacons transmitted from devices to Google, reflecting devices that Google calculated were or could have been ... located within the geographical region bounded by the latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates, dates, and times below.”

Geographical coordinates provided with the warrant cover an area of a block that contains the police guild building and various other businesses and also includes all four street intersections at the edge of the block. The timeframe of the warrant begins at 10PM PT and extends till 11:15PM.

The nature of such a warrant means that any Android user passing through the area during that hour would have their information disclosed to the FBI by Google.

Generally, when geofence warrants are issued, Google returns an anonymized list of devices that were present in the defined area over the given time period. If any of these devices seem to belong to suspects in the case, investigators may ask Google to release more information.

Court records show Google complied with the warrant, as it was returned as executed the following day. However, the fact that a public appeal for information was made by the FBI months after the warrant was granted suggests that any information provided by Google did not help with the investigation.

“As with all law enforcement requests, we have a rigorous process that is designed to protect the privacy of our users while supporting the important work of law enforcement,” a Google spokesperson said.

A press request sent to the FBI’s Seattle field office had not received a response by time of publication, and a spokesperson for the Seattle Police Department said she was not immediately able to comment on technical details of the investigation.

While some towns saw significant property damage in the wake of the Jacob Blake protests, all evidence shows the attack against the Seattle union building was ineffective and notable mostly as an affront to local police. Surveillance footage [released by police](#) shows two people running into the parking lot of the SPOG building and launching the flaming projectiles at the building. The video appears to show one of the Molotov cocktails extinguishing soon after being thrown while another bursts above an outdoor stairwell.

The use of geofence warrants has grown rapidly across the US in recent years, with data released by Google [showing a dramatic spike from 2018 to 2020](#). According to Google’s transparency report, the company received 11,554 of these warrants in 2020 compared to only 982 in 2018.

	It's not the first time authorities have used geofence warrants in response to a Black Lives Matter (BLM) protest. Separately to the Seattle case described above, six separate warrants were issued in Kenosha, Wisconsin to collect information on devices in proximity to protest areas after the shooting of Jacob Blake.
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HEADLINE	02/05 Teen girls TikTok videos mental health toll
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/teen-girls-sexy-tiktok-videos-take-a-mental-health-toll-11644016839?mod=hp_listb_pos1
GIST	<p>When Julia Anderson joined TikTok at age 16, her first video featured her family's home renovations. It got five likes. After seeing others post risqué videos and get more likes, she tried it, too.</p> <p>"I wanted to get famous on TikTok, and I learned that if you post stuff showing your body, people will start liking it," Julia, now an 18-year-old high-school senior near Sacramento, Calif., said.</p> <p>Sudden TikTok fame is catching teens off guard, leaving many girls unprepared for the attention they thought they wanted, according to parents, therapists and teens. In some cases, predators target girls who make sexually suggestive videos; less-dangerous interactions can also harm girls' self-esteem and leave them feeling exploited, they say.</p> <p>Mental-health professionals around the country are growing increasingly concerned about the effects on teen girls of posting sexualized TikTok videos. Therapists say teens who lack a group of close friends, and teens with underlying mental health issues—especially girls who struggle with disordered eating and body-image issues—are at particular risk.</p> <p>"For a young girl who's developing her identity, to be swept up into a sexual world like that is hugely destructive," said Paul Sunseri, a psychologist and director of the New Horizons Child and Family Institute in El Dorado Hills, Calif., where Julia began receiving treatment last year for anxiety and depression. "When teen girls are rewarded for their sexuality, they come to believe that their value is in how they look," he said.</p> <p>He said approximately a quarter of the female patients at his clinic have produced sexualized content on TikTok.</p> <p>Carter Barnhart, co-founder of Charlie Health, a virtual mental-health care provider, said a growing number of teens she treats report their self-esteem is dependent on the quantity of likes they get on TikTok. "Many of them have figured out that the formula for that is producing more sexual content," she said.</p> <p>Videos just 'for you'</p> <p>Teens' dependence on TikTok for social validation has risen as the app has become their favored platform. TikTok overtook Instagram in popularity among teens last year—and became the most visited site on the internet.</p> <p>TikTok's algorithm regularly propels virtual nobodies onto millions of viewers' For You pages. TikTok weighs whether viewers show strong interest in a particular type of content, measured by whether they finish watching videos, the company says. Its recommendation engine then chooses videos to send to those viewers, regardless of the creator's follower count or past video virality.</p> <p>Platforms like Instagram, YouTube and Twitter work differently, serving content to users based on search terms and friend connections, so developing a sizable following—and going viral—on those sites can take longer.</p> <p>"We think carefully about the well-being of teens as we design our safety and privacy settings and restrict features on TikTok by age," a TikTok spokeswoman said in a statement. "We've also worked with youth</p>

safety experts to develop resources aimed at supporting digital safety and literacy conversations among parents and teens.”

A [company fact sheet says](#) “content that is overtly sexually suggestive may not be eligible for recommendation.” The spokeswoman said content from users who state they are under 16 isn’t eligible for promotion via the recommendation engine, nor would it appear in search results.

Teens are known to lie about their age when creating social-media accounts. Users must be 13 to create a TikTok account, and it is company policy to [suspend the accounts of kids](#) the safety team believes to be underage.

At Newport Academy’s outpatient treatment program in Atlanta, 60% of the girls treated since the program started last summer have posted sexually inappropriate videos on TikTok, said Crystal Burwell, the program’s director of outpatient services.

One 16-year-old girl Dr. Burwell is treating made progressively more suggestive videos. “The more likes she had, the more revealing her outfits became,” she said.

The girl ended up chatting with a man who urged her to take their conversation off TikTok and into a messaging app. The girl sent the man partially nude photos of herself and the two were making plans to meet in person when her parents discovered the texts, according to Dr. Burwell.

“When you combine human behavior and algorithms, things get messy,” Dr. Burwell said. “We’re trying to clean it up, one client at a time.”

TikTok famous

A few months after she joined the app in the summer of 2019, Julia Anderson’s wish for TikTok fame came true. A video of her wearing a tightfitting tank top and lip-syncing the pop song “Sunday Best” blew up. For reasons Julia and her mother, Shauna Anderson, still don’t understand, TikTok’s algorithm pushed the video to viewers’ For You pages. More than a million people viewed the video and nearly 500,000 people liked it, they both said.

Julia’s following went from a few hundred to more than 200,000. There was nothing overtly sexual about the video, she and her mother said, but her video’s comments were inundated with boys and men saying how hot she looked.

Buoyed by the success, Julia made her videos more risqué, including by lip-syncing lyrics about sex and getting more revealing in her wardrobe choices. “I’d wear clothes that I wouldn’t wear to school but that I felt good in,” she said. “I didn’t view them as that sexual, but other people did.”

By then, she was constantly checking her likes. “It was my whole world,” she said.

Her parents weren’t aware of how suggestive the videos had gotten until Julia’s grandparents, tipped off by cousins, alerted them.

“To us, she’s this sweet girl, so it’s almost like this split personality between who she really is and how she portrayed herself on TikTok,” Ms. Anderson said. “When we confronted her about it, she was like, ‘Mom, that’s what everyone is doing.’”

Ms. Anderson said that her daughter didn’t have a close group of friends, and she thinks the isolation of the pandemic intensified her need to find connection. “She thought this was a way to be liked and have friends,” Ms. Anderson said. “I struggled with what to do, because the thing I love about TikTok is that kids can be really creative, and we encouraged that as a family.”

Worried about dangers that might arise from publicly viewable videos, Julia’s parents asked her to delete the suggestive ones. They also discussed the issue in family and individual therapy sessions.

	<p>Jula, who said she had a history of anxiety before joining TikTok, said the widespread attention and creepy comments from men had become difficult to handle. Comments critical of her appearance also stung.</p> <p>Following the intervention, she chose to step away from TikTok for a few months. She said it was hard. In the middle of last year, she returned to the app but created a new account that she set to private. She has just a few followers—people she knows in real life. She said she rarely posts now.</p> <p>Jula said she ultimately decided that the suggestive videos weren't how she wanted to portray herself to the world, or to younger girls who might see them. She has four younger sisters and said she doesn't want them to seek or receive attention the way she did.</p> <p>"I think I tried growing up a lot faster than I should have," Jula said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/04 News Corp hit in cyberattack; China nexus?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/4/news-corp-hit-cyberattack-investigators-believe-in/
GIST	<p>News Corp said Friday it suffered a cyberattack in January affecting its journalists and other employees, and investigators think the hackers gathered intelligence to benefit China.</p> <p>The Wall Street Journal reported it was among those affected by the attack, which News Corp disclosed in its quarterly report filed to the Securities and Exchange Commission. According to the newspaper, the attack was discovered on Jan. 20, and affected journalists and other employees at its publication; its parent Dow Jones; the New York Post; the company's news operation in the U.K.; and News Corp. headquarters.</p> <p>In its filing to the SEC, News Corp said its preliminary analysis showed data was taken and a foreign government was possibly involved. The private cybersecurity firm Mandiant, which was hired to help investigate the breach, is pointing its finger toward China.</p> <p>"Mandiant assesses that those behind this activity have a China nexus, and we believe they are likely involved in espionage activities to collect intelligence to benefit China's interests," David Wong, Mandiant vice president, said in a statement.</p> <p>News Corp told the SEC it is not aware of the "persistent cyberattack activity" affecting any customer or financial data and said the company has not experienced any business operations or systems interruptions. The Journal reported News Corp notified law enforcement alongside hiring Mandiant.</p> <p>"There is no assurance that cybersecurity threats or activity such as that discovered in January 2022 will not have a material adverse effect in the future," read News Corp's filing to SEC.</p> <p>The company said it and its vendors adopted countermeasures to protect personal data, business information and other confidential information. It also took steps to prevent future security breaches, according to the filing.</p> <p>Allegations that China-based hackers are attacking prominent U.S.-based news organizations are not new. In 2013, The New York Times reported that Chinese hackers targeted its reporters and employees over four months and infiltrated the publication's computer systems.</p> <p>Earlier this week, FBI Director Christopher Wray said Chinese cybercriminals had targeted American companies and that China's intelligence services and affiliated hackers worked as part of a technology theft program larger than that of all other foreign adversaries combined.</p> <p>The FBI separately published a warning saying nation-state hackers may launch cyberattacks targeting the Beijing Olympic Games. The FBI's alert noted that Olympic participants and those traveling to the games should be wary of using mobile apps in China because the apps could be used to steal information, track people and install malware.</p>

	“The FBI urges all athletes to keep their personal cellphones at home and use a temporary phone while at the Games,” the FBI warning said.
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HEADLINE	02/04 DOL online licensing shuttered: data breach
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/dol-shuts-down-online-business-licensing-services-due-to-data-breach
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON - During the week of Jan. 24, the Washington Department of Licensing shut down its Professional Online Licensing and Regulatory Information System (POLARIS), frustrating small business owners as they try to stay afloat during the pandemic.</p> <p>On Feb. 3, the agency announced that the reason they shut down POLARIS was because of a data breach.</p> <p>While the typical Washingtonian uses the DOL for driver and vehicle licensing, POLARIS provides the licenses for businesses and professionals to make sure they are in compliance with the state and have proper documentation. Without licenses, shops can be shut down.</p> <p>"The POLARIS system stores information about its license holders and applicants. The type of information varies for different licenses and may include social security numbers, dates of birth, driver license numbers, and other personally-identifying information. If our investigation concludes that your personal information has been accessed, DOL will notify you and provide you with further assistance," the DOL said.</p> <p>"We know that there was some malicious activity," said Christine Anthony, spokesperson for WA State DOL. "We just don't know the scope. We don't know how many people are affected we're hoping to make that determination quickly."</p> <p>It does not appear that any information from driver and vehicle licensing systems were compromised.</p> <p>Cybersecurity expert Michael Hamilton told FOX 13 that he believes this data breach is going to be much bigger than what the DOL has described now. Hamilton also said the timing is ripe for this breach as we get into tax season.</p> <p>"It doesn't sound good, especially before tax time because you know that's when fraudsters really get after it," said Hamilton, Founder of Critical Insight. "It's really time to make sure that all of your financial accounts are really bolted down, that you're using multifactor authentication, not just a password, but also a code that comes over your phone."</p> <p>Hamilton recommends people create an online account with the IRS so no one else can.</p> <p>With the outage, anyone trying to renew their license can't submit their application, including bail bonds, cosmetologists, employment agencies, home inspectors, nail technicians, notaries, security guards, tattoo artists, taxis and many others.</p> <p>"No one is going to have me come to their home and inspect it if I'm not licensed," said Anthony Marshall, real estate appraiser. "It's loss of income. It's like showing up to work, and they say hey you can't work today."</p> <p>The Department of Licensing issues licenses for around 40 businesses and professions. Of that total, 23 are contained within its professional licensing system, along with the Board of Registration for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors, which is a separate state agency.</p> <p>Businesses/Professions in the professional licensing system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appraisal Management Companies • Architects

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auctioneers and Auctioneer Companies • Bail Bond Agencies, Bail Bond Agents, Bail Bond Recovery Agents • Body Art/Body Piercing/Tattoo • Camping Resort Companies and Camping Resort Salesperson • Cemeteries • Combative Sports • Commercial Driver Training • Cosmetology • Court Reporters • Driver Training Schools • Funeral Directors, Embalmers, Interns; and Funeral Establishments • Geologists • Home Inspectors • Landscape Architects • Motorcycle Schools • Notaries • Private Investigators and Private Investigator Agencies • Real Estate Appraisers • Real Estate Brokers, Managing Brokers, Firms and Branch Offices • Security Guards and Security Guard Companies • Timeshare Companies and Salesperson <p>The DOL said that they have created an Intent to Review form for businesses and professionals trying to renew their licenses while POLARIS is down. DOL will not take action against a license based on its expiration date while POLARIS is down.</p> <p>You can find that form here.</p> <p>DOL is working to get POLARIS back online but has not mentioned a specific date.</p> <p>Businesses concerned about the security of their personal information can learn more here.</p>
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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	02/06 ISIS growing threat to Libya, Tunisia
SOURCE	https://en.218tv.net/2022/02/06/isis-a-growing-threat-to-libya-and-tunisia/
GIST	<p>Terrorism that stems from religious ideology has always transcended national borders, as it does not recognize these borders that contradict its fundamentalist rhetoric, which considers the Islamic caliphate in its loose sense the basis of its political activity, and this was evident in the agendas of the terrorist organization ISIS that announced the establishment of its Islamic state, taking advantage of the groups that were operating under the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda, which lost its stronghold in Afghanistan, and lost the ability to communicate with these groups around the world.</p> <p>The political vacuum that followed the Arab Spring revolutions exacerbated the security concern, as the terrorist organization ISIS succeeded in creating networks of communication among extremist elements around the world. Terrorist operations that claimed the lives of hundreds of innocent people, while the organization contributed to the transfer of weapons, ammunition and explosive materials into the Tunisian interior to destabilize and hit the nerve center of the Tunisian economy based on the inputs of the tourism sector.</p>

Tunisia's trial of a terrorist cell of four members accused of bringing shipments of weapons and explosives into Tunisia from Libya sheds light on the extent of cooperation among terrorists and the heavy bill paid by the two countries as a result of the expansion of their activities. Tunisia accuses the cell of importing weapons and explosives after smuggling them from Libya to be used later in suicide operations, through explosive belts and car bombs.

ISIS is exploiting Libya as a refuge for the organization's leaders fleeing from Tunisia and being pursued at the national and international levels, which is consistent with information obtained by 218News from security sources confirming that the Libyan security services arrested the dangerous Tunisian terrorist "Bilal bin Abdulwahab bin Trad" in Tripoli, in intensive security follow-up framework for potential terrorists in the Nafusa and Sabratha regions.

About two weeks ago, sources from the Attorney General's Office confirmed to 218News that the security services were conducting search operations after receiving information confirming the presence of the prominent Tunisian leader in ISIS, Ashraf bin Fathi al-Qizani, in the west of the country.

218News obtained an official document directed from the General Directorate of Security Operations to the Ministry of the Interior, confirming that the terrorists Hamza bin Salem Al-Aib and Al-Hadi bin Daou Al-Ghweil, wanted by the Tunisian authorities, are in Libya, specifically in the village of Takout near Nalut.

This operation is not the first of its kind in the recent period, as the Internal Security Service succeeded earlier in arresting the terrorist Mhamed Al-Tawati, from the city of Sabratha, who joined the terrorist organization "ISIS" in late 2015, at the height of its activity in the West Coast region, where the terrorist took over Operations to facilitate the entry of terrorists from Tunisia into Libya to carry out terrorist operations, the most dangerous of which was the reception of the suicide bomber at the Corentia Hotel, terrorist Idris Al-Amrousi, upon his arrival from Tunisia, via the city of Al-Jamil.

Security reports indicate that terrorists continue to move through the most dangerous corridors linking Libya and Tunisia, where ISIS leaders are secretly located in areas of the Nafusa Mountains and the western coast, where it is expected that the security prosecutions will lead to the overthrow of the leaders wanted at the local and international levels.

The remarkable activity of these groups between Libya and Tunisia raises questions about the security role and government coordination between the two sides, in light of the seemingly fleeting tension in the relationship between the two countries after mutual accusations of supporting terrorism, an atmosphere in which the terrorist organization may find a wide area of work with the recent escalation of its activity in the arena. In addition to declaring the presence of its cells in the southwest of the country in light of the fragile security along the African Sahel region.

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HEADLINE	02/07 Student jailed; online bomb making guides
SOURCE	https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/minecraft-terror-student-nazi-guides-london-crime-met-jailed-terror-b981070.html
GIST	<p>(This is the first picture of) a neo-Nazi student who hid detailed instructions on how to make homemade bombs among popular kids video game guides.</p> <p>Connor Burke, 19, from Bexleyheath, was jailed for three-and-a-half years after pleading guilty to disseminating a terrorist publication explaining how to create improvised explosive devices (IEDs).</p> <p>Counter terrorism officers raided his family home in Bexleyheath finding Nazi Germany memorabilia - including SS daggers, rings, uniform and a copy of 'Mein Kampf' in the teenager's room after tracking the post down to a London university.</p>

Further terrorist documents, including the Anarchy Cookbook Version 2000, which gave recipes and advice for making explosives, had also been downloaded by Burke and disguised as handbooks to the popular video game [Minecraft](#).

He was accused of having posted the guides, which outline how to craft Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), on Telegram to a group containing around 12,000 users.

The electronic document was named Minecraft_Bow_Ammo_Types.pdf in an apparent attempt to disguise its true nature.

He was also a member of a Telegram “English Only” group, and had posted a list of the names of fellow university students in September 2020 with the comment “my lectures are full of P***s”.

Burke’s barrister, Naeem Mian QC, said the teenager’s “mortified” parents were at [Woolwich crown court](#) for the sentencing hearing, and believe he “fell down a rabbit hole” online during [lockdown](#).

“It is every parent’s worst nightmare,” he said. “Through a toxic combination coming together, a young man who is from a very loving background but socially isolated found he was having to stay at home as many people were during lockdown. So the isolation was even greater.

“He was therefore spending too much time on his computer and on the internet, in his room by himself. “He is a young man who has disappeared down something one would term as a rabbit hole. A very dark rabbit hole which became something of an echo chamber.”

Commander Richard Smith, head of the Met’s Counter Terrorism Command, said: “Burke had an unhealthy interest in extreme right wing terrorist ideology, and this led to him sharing extremely dangerous material with others online.

“Increasingly, we’re seeing young people being drawn into extremist ideologies, some of whom – like Burke – then go on to commit serious terrorism offences.”

He pleaded guilty to all the counts at a hearing in July 2021 – but claimed that the dissemination of the bomb-making manual was done so on a reckless basis.

Following this, the judge rejected Burke’s basis of plea insofar as recklessness; determining that Burke posted the manual in the knowledge it could directly or indirectly be used by others members of the group in which it was posted and assist in the preparation or commission of terrorist acts.

He was sentenced at Woolwich Crown Court on Friday, 4 February to a total of 42 months’ imprisonment and an additional 12 months on licence.

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HEADLINE	02/06 UNICEF visits children in Syria prison
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/unicef-team-visits-children-syria-prison-attack-82705855
GIST	<p>BEIRUT -- Officials from the U.N. children’s agency visited a prison in northeast Syria that witnessed 10 days of fighting between U.S.-backed fighters and Islamic State group militants, the agency said Sunday.</p> <p>The UNICEF team said after visiting some children at the prison in the city of Hassakeh on Saturday that they have lived in dire conditions at the detention center for years and in January “witnessed and survived heightened violence” in and around the prison.</p> <p>The visit came two days after IS’s top leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, was killed in a U.S. raid on his safehouse in northwest Syria. President Joe Biden said al-Qurayshi had been responsible for the Syria prison assault.</p>

Over 3,000 inmates, of which some 600 are children, are held at the Hassakeh prison, known as Gweiran or al-Sinaa.

“Despite some of the basic services now in place, the situation of these children is incredibly precarious,” Bo Viktor Nylund, UNICEF’s Syria representative, said in the statement.

While boys were held separately from adults, the groups mixed when IS militants stormed the prison in a jailbreak on Jan. 20. Some inmates escaped, while others including child detainees were taken hostage in the ensuing battle.

“Children should never have been there in the first place,” Nylund said, adding that UNICEF is working to provide safety and care for them while calling on all stakeholders to urgently find long-term solutions in the best interests of the children.

He said UNICEF is ready to help support a new safe place in Syria’s northeast to take care of the most vulnerable children, some of whom are as young as 12.

At a press conference on Jan. 31, the U.S.-backed and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces said they had retaken control of the prison and confirmed that 77 prison employees, 40 Kurdish fighters and four civilians were killed, alongside 374 IS detainees and attackers.

The SDF provided no breakdown of the dead detainees, or how many of them were children.

Nylund said destruction in the surrounding area of the prison is significant with destroyed homes affecting an estimated 30,000 people. He said every effort, including by the Syrian government and local authorities, to provide immediate assistance should be supported.

“Children should never be in detention due to association with armed groups,” Nylund said. “Children associated with and recruited by armed groups should always be treated as victims of conflict.”

He said UNICEF calls for the immediate release of children in all detention centers across northeast Syria and for handing them over to child protection agencies. He said UNICEF calls on member states of foreign children to repatriate them.

For years, some countries have refused to repatriate detained children in Syria while Kurdish authorities have expressed concern they may have extremist tendencies.

“UNICEF stands ready to facilitate the speedy and systematic repatriation of foreign children and the reintegration of children in Syria to their communities of origin,” Nylund said. He added that the pace of repatriation and integration of children stranded in Syria “is far too slow. This is unacceptable.”

On Friday, Human Rights Watch said hundreds of boys are missing from the fighting in and around the prison.

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HEADLINE	02/05 Afghan refugees face tier system in Europe
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/05/world/europe/afghan-refugees-two-tier-system-in-europe.html
GIST	<p>Some of the Afghan women around the table in the neoclassical building in central Athens were making notes in leatherbound notebooks as they debated the future of women and girls in their homeland. They were legislators, journalists and judges — but they were also refugees, a characterization that many of them winced at with shame and disbelief.</p> <p>“For a woman who’s been working for 20 years, to have to come here and be called a refugee, it’s not an easy thing,” said Khatera Saeedi, a journalist, as others in the group nodded emphatically.</p>

The presence of Ms. Saeedi and the other refugees in Athens brought into focus a complicated reality for the tens of thousands airlifted after the Taliban takeover: The Afghans Europe wants are the ones who had never wanted to be there.

“I had a very nice life back in Afghanistan,” said Wahida, 31, an international-organization worker from Kabul, Afghanistan’s capital, who was evacuated to the Netherlands and who wanted to be identified by only her first name. “I had a very prestigious and challenging job, and I never thought of seeking asylum in another country.”

As Kabul [fell to the Taliban in August](#), and Afghanistan’s elites were airlifted to Western destinations, European Union nations committed to take in up to 40,000, many of whom have already reached Europe.

Many are those educated and skilled enough to be connected to the vast international presence that defined Afghan life for the past 20 years — ultimately also giving them the connections to make their way abroad through legitimate channels.

They stand in contrast to tens of thousands of others from their country who made their way in recent years to Europe’s doorstep — sometimes smuggled, often over arduous land journeys of thousands of miles and then a final risky sea crossing — only to be turned away.

Since the Taliban takeover, Afghans have made the most asylum requests in the European Union, according to the European Asylum Support Office. But even before last year, Afghans consistently made up one of the largest groups seeking asylum from abroad.

For many years, they were bumped to the back of the line, their applications rejected in favor of refugees from more urgent and proximate conflicts, like that in Syria.

Afghans and Iraqis, both fleeing lengthy Western-led wars, faced similar difficulties as asylum seekers in Europe, said Camille Le Coz, an expert with the Migration Policy Institute, a Brussels-based research institute, who has worked in Afghanistan.

But the arrival of thousands of evacuees from Kabul brought to the surface a long-underlying current in E.U. migration policy.

“It highlights the dichotomy the E.U. has been trying to create between people who arrive in Europe to request asylum through safe and legal pathways and those who arrive through irregular means — and the latter are not welcomed,” she said.

But those pathways are all but shut to the vast majority of refugees, a fact that forces thousands of people to arrive in Europe through dangerous and expensive smuggling routes.

Normally, only about half of the Afghans who applied for asylum in the European Union were successful. That acceptance rate jumped to 91 percent in the last months of 2021, as E.U. evacuees were fast-tracked through normally sluggish asylum bureaucracies.

The Dutch government, which maintained a military presence in Afghanistan, swiftly granted asylum to the 2,000 Afghans it evacuated, but has practically put on hold all claims from Afghans who arrived irregularly.

Athens is now the temporary home to about 170 prominent Afghan women and their families, including one-third of the country’s female legislators, who were flown there by a coalition of charitable foundations and will be resettled in Germany and other wealthy nations.

They have been gathering at Melissa Network, a nongovernmental organization in central Athens that supports female migrants and refugees. Melissa has been offering them a daily sanctuary, a space to meet and talk, and organizing legal aid and mental health workshops.

“There is a significant difference between the way these women became refugees and the experience of other refugees,” said Thalia Portokaloglou, a mental health expert with Melissa.

“They carry the pain and the fear that we see in all women we work with here,” she added, “but they also come with purpose, which helps them find meaning in life.”

The legislators among the evacuees in Athens were working feverishly to set up an in-exile organization to advocate Afghan women’s rights, and through that, to hold onto their identities and senses of purpose.

“I think about the people who came and gave me their vote,” said Shagufa Noorzai, who was Afghanistan’s youngest legislator when she was elected to Parliament from Helmand Province in 2019, adding that she felt guilty for fleeing as her constituents stayed behind to face the Taliban and starvation.

“A politician should be with their people in war,” said Nazifa Yusufi Bek, another legislator, from Takhar Province. “Now we are in Europe, we are safe, but our concern is for our people in Afghanistan.”

While most deportations of Afghans from the European Union have stopped in recent months, the bloc has tried to discourage ordinary Afghans from coming, and is paying neighboring countries hundreds of millions of dollars to host fleeing refugees in an effort to deter them from moving toward Europe.

“The borders remain open to those fleeing violence and persecution,” Margaritis Schinas, a top European Commission official, said in an interview with Italy’s La Stampa newspaper on Aug. 15, the day that Kabul fell.

But “we must be clear,” he added, “we will only accept those who really need protection — those who cross borders illegally will be sent back.”

And not only do Afghans and other asylum seekers in Europe face long waits and poor odds of gaining protection, they are also increasingly facing indiscriminate violence and extrajudicial expulsions at Europe’s external borders, preventing them from lodging asylum requests in the first place.

In early September, only two weeks after Kabul fell and as sympathy toward Afghans was peaking, Greek border guards allegedly violently expelled to Turkey a large group of asylum seekers, including Afghans. Among them was an Italian legal resident of Afghan origin who was in Greece working for Frontex, the European Union border agency, and had been mistaken for an asylum seeker by the very border guards he was there to help.

Most Afghans travel across Asia to Turkey and arrive in Greece by putting themselves in the hands of smugglers who place them on precarious dinghies to cross the Aegean Sea. If they manage to lodge asylum requests, they have to wait for years in legal and financial limbo until their claims are assessed.

That has been the experience of another Afghan woman at Melissa who was there to help the newly arrived group of evacuees: the organization’s Farsi interpreter, Karime Ganji.

She arrived in Greece in 2016 after a dramatic overland journey in the middle of winter, crossing mountains and rivers with her two children, then 3 and 9. Over the past five years in Athens, she has learned English and Greek, and enrolled at a university in Athens. But her asylum request is still pending.

Ms. Ganji said she sympathized with the group of prominent women she was helping, but added that other Afghans and other asylum seekers also deserved more support.

“They came from bloodshed, they are survivors,” she said through tears. “I don’t see them as politicians, just as a small group of innocent people from Afghanistan who need help.”

HEADLINE	02/06 Afghanistan healthcare system collapsing
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/06/world/asia/afghanistans-health-care-system.html
GIST	<p>KABUL, Afghanistan — Amena, 7 months old, lay silently in her hospital crib amid the mewling of desperately ill infants in the malnutrition ward.</p> <p>Her mother, Balqisa, had brought the child to Indira Gandhi Children’s Hospital in Kabul, Afghanistan’s capital, the night before. “Her body was so hot,” she said, stroking her daughter’s emaciated leg.</p> <p>The baby had a high fever, convulsions and sepsis, said Dr. Mohammad Iqbal Sadiq, a pediatrician, glancing at her chart.</p> <p>“Her chances are not good,” the doctor said. “We got her too late.”</p> <p>At the Indira Gandhi hospital, and in faltering hospitals across Afghanistan, famished children arrive by car and taxi and ambulance every day and night. Acute malnutrition is just one of a cascade of maladies that threaten to topple the country’s fragile health system.</p> <p>Late last month, Antonio Guterres, the United Nations secretary-general, told the Security Council that Afghanistan was “hanging by a thread,” as he called for countries to suspend all sanctions that restricted the delivery of humanitarian aid to the country.</p> <p>“For 20 years, we kept Afghanistan on a transfusion,” said Filipe Ribeiro, country representative for Medecins Sans Frontieres in Kabul. “Overnight, we removed the drip. Now we have to find a way to put it back.”</p> <p>Three-quarters of Afghanistan’s population had plunged into acute poverty, with 4.7 million Afghans likely to suffer severe malnutrition this year, according to the United Nations. Last month, the organization made its biggest appeal ever for a single country, asking international donors to give more than \$5 billion to fend off a humanitarian disaster.</p> <p>Save the Children said the number of critically malnourished children visiting its clinics in Afghanistan had doubled since August, with 40 children dying in December on their way to receive medical care.</p> <p>Jonas Gahr Store, the prime minister of Norway, whose country hosted meetings between Taliban representatives and Afghan civil society groups last week, spoke to the Security Council about the urgency to expedite aid.</p> <p>“We need new agreements and commitments in place to be able to assist and help an extremely vulnerable civil population, and most vulnerable among them, the children who face hunger and suffering,” he said.</p> <p>Before the U.S.-backed Afghan government disintegrated in August as the Taliban overran the country, the health system relied on international aid to survive. But much of that funding has been frozen to comply with sanctions imposed on the Taliban.</p> <p>As a result, the International Rescue Committee recently predicted that 90 percent of Afghanistan’s health clinics are likely to shut down in the coming months. The World Health Organization has said that outbreaks of diarrhea, measles, dengue fever, malaria and Covid-19 threaten to overwhelm overburdened hospitals.</p> <p>Kabul’s Indira Gandhi hospital nearly shut down in October, when the unpaid staff had to cut down trees for cooking fires. A flush of funding in November from the International Committee of the Red Cross allowed it to keep its doors open and provide desperately needed medical supplies.</p> <p>The infusion could keep the hospital afloat for the next several months, according to Dr. Sadiq, the pediatrician.</p>

“After that, no one knows what will happen,” he said.

While there have been other infusions of aid, [including \\$308 million in relief authorized](#) by the United States, they have not been enough to cover 1,200 health facilities and 11,000 health workers.

Though the dramatic decline in war-related casualties has relieved the burden of such patients on many hospitals, the suspension of operations by private facilities and the ability to safely travel Afghanistan’s roads has left other hospitals overrun with people.

On a recent morning, the corridors of Indira Gandhi hospital were crammed with beds as patients’ family members squatted on floors amid parcels of food bought at the local bazaar.

Patients’ meals consist of an egg, two apples, a milk packet, rice and juice, so many families supplement them with outside food. Some buy medicine at local pharmacies because the hospital can provide only about 70 percent of required medication, Dr. Sadiq said.

In the children’s critical care ward, many of the tiny cribs held two or three infants. In the ward for premature babies, two newborns had been placed in some incubators designed for a single infant.

“I’ve never seen it like this,” said Dr. Sadiq, who has worked at the hospital for more than three years. “And just imagine this same situation in every hospital in Afghanistan.”

The hospital, the largest in Afghanistan, is squeezing 500 patients into the 360-bed facility, Dr. Hasibullah Rahimzay Wardak, the hospital director, said. More than 1,000 patients arrive on a typical day, many from distant provinces. About 250 to 300 are admitted daily.

In the crowded malnutrition ward, 15 to 20 emaciated babies arrived daily, with about 60 infants filling the crowded malnutrition ward on any given day. The mortality rate is 2 to 3 percent, Dr. Sadiq said.

Soraya, 2, had arrived 20 days earlier, dangerously underweight and gasping for breath. Her mother, Sara, 17, sat by her child’s bed as the girl’s bony chest heaved up and down. Dr. Sadiq tenderly lifted the girl’s legs, which were limp and swollen.

Soraya weighed 14 pounds on arrival, the doctor said, but weighed just 12 pounds now. Even so, he said, her condition had improved. Her chances of survival were good.

Adding more pressure on Afghanistan’s overburdened health care system is a fourth wave of Covid-19. Yet the virus is an afterthought in Afghanistan, where many people struggle to find enough to eat every day.

Few Afghans wear masks — even at the Ministry of Public Health in Kabul. There, officials clustered in groups on a recent weekday, greeting visitors with hugs and kisses, and ignoring faded signs saying masks were required throughout the building.

At the Afghan-Japan Communicable Disease Hospital in Kabul, the only remaining Covid-19 facility in the capital, few staff members or patients complied with worn stickers on the floors that proclaimed: “Let’s Beat Coronavirus — Please keep at least 2 meters from people around you.”

“When I try to talk to people about Covid-19, they say we have no food, no water, no electricity — why should we care about this virus?” said Dr. Tariq Ahmad Akbari, the hospital’s medical director.

Dr. Akbari suspected that the Omicron variant had entered the country, but the hospital lacked the medical equipment to test for variants. He and his staff had not been paid for five months, he said, and the hospital was critically low on oxygen supplies and health care workers.

Seven of the hospital's eight female doctors fled after the Taliban takeover in August, part of a hollowing out that reduced the staff from 350 to 190 the past five months. Four of the five staff microbiologists quit. And only five of the country's 34 Covid-19 centers were still operating, Dr. Akbari said.

Several staff members lived in the hospital in Kabul because, without salaries, they cannot afford rent, he said.

The hospital was recently buoyed by a two-month stopgap grant of \$800,000 from an affiliate of Johns Hopkins Hospital, Dr. Akbari said. And Afghanistan's relative isolation following the Taliban takeover had likely helped contain the spread of Covid-19, he said.

Up to 20 patients died per day during the previous wave, but just one or two a day now. And the hospital tests about 150 patients a day now, down from 600 to 700 daily tests during the second wave, Dr. Akbari said.

He speculated that Afghans are so overwhelmed by other survival issues that they are less likely to seek treatment for Covid-19.

Before the Taliban takeover, the Ministry of Public Health published detailed daily charts showing the number of coronavirus cases, hospitalizations and deaths — and the positivity rate for testing. But now the poorly funded ministry struggles to keep tabs on the pandemic.

Of the more than 856,000 tests conducted since the first wave of Covid-19 in early 2020 — of an estimated population of nearly 40 million — roughly 163,000 were positive, a health ministry spokesman said. More than 7,400 Covid-19 deaths had been confirmed since 2020, he said.

But because testing is extremely limited and the cause of death is not recorded in many instances, particularly in rural areas of Afghanistan, no one knows the pandemic's true scale.

Dr. Akbari shook his head in frustration as he described how little was known about the virus in Afghanistan.

Looking defeated, he said: "If we have a surge like we had during the second and third wave, we would not be equipped to handle it."

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HEADLINE	02/06 Britain's dedicated terrorist prison wing
SOURCE	https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10480629/Inside-Britains-dedicated-terrorist-prison-wing.html
GIST	<p>Nothing about the terrorist's 8ft by 5ft cell seems exceptional, at least at first glance. Single bed, thin blue mattress, toilet, sink, wooden table. But the windows are a different matter.</p> <p>Impossible to penetrate, they feature sound-blocking glass 'bafflers' to prevent the cell's highly dangerous occupant from communicating with – and trying to radicalise – inmates on other wings.</p> <p>Here at Britain's first dedicated prison 'terrorist wing' – where those caught trying to radicalise fellow inmates are cocooned – the security measures are as much designed to stop extreme ideologies from getting out as they are to keep the extremists locked in.</p> <p>Last week, The Mail on Sunday, accompanied by Justice Secretary Dominic Raab, became the first newspaper to report from the 'separation centre' – or jail within a jail – at HMP Frankland near Durham.</p> <p>It is reportedly home to, among others, Hashem Abedi, who helped organise the 2017 Manchester Arena attack, and at least one Islamic State fighter. One prison official said the unit is the 'least worst option' for handling the prisoners. It is, he added, about 'protecting the many from the few'.</p>

For years, the unit at Frankland, established in 2017, was the only one of its kind in operation. But the MoS learned that a second at HMP Woodhill in Milton Keynes is now up and running while Mr Raab revealed plans to use them more widely.

The move comes after the attacks carried out by released terrorist prisoners Usman Khan, who murdered two people in the Fishmongers' Hall attack in London in 2019, and Sudesh Amman, who carried out a knife attack in Streatham, South London, a few months later.

Mr Raab said: 'Separation centres are critical to isolating the most radical offenders, who seek to poison the minds of other prisoners with their perverse ideologies. I want to make it easier for prison governors to put these dangerous predators into separation centres, to stop them recruiting more terrorist foot soldiers. Clearly the role of separation centres is going to increase.'

While far-Right extremists have been considered for places in the units, Frankland and Woodhill at present hold only Islamist radicals. Around 220 terrorist offenders are currently in UK jails with a similar number considered 'at-risk' of being radicalised. Given that threat, another separation unit at HMP Full Sutton near York is on standby.

Human rights campaigners have likened the separation centres to the Camp X-Ray detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, but Frankland officials say the men in their unit have settled into a routine.

'Most of these guys are on enhanced [privileges],' said a prison officer. 'They are actually well-behaved. One is a dedicated cleaner who makes sure everything is tidy and another is the orderly looking after the unit's kitchen.'

Judging by the gleaming surfaces, they are doing a good job. Prisoners can order ingredients and cook their own meals. Plastic utensils –bright red, numbered and kept in a glass case on the wall in the prison officers' office – must be booked out and returned clean after use.

From the outside HMP Frankland, which looms into view along a quiet hedgerow-lined lane, resembles an anonymous company headquarters. Visitors to the separation centre – located at the heart of the prison – face innumerable high-tech security checks: fingerprinting, airport-style scanners, body searches, the list goes on.

A veteran officer, with a huge set of keys jangling around his waist, led an MoS reporter and photographer through the jail. There are between 15 and 20 locked gates separating the jail entrance from the isolation unit.

At the end lies a blue linoleum-floor entrance and a CCTV-monitored corridor with beige brick walls. All is scrupulously clean, claustrophobic and, with cell doors painted green, it has the feel of a high-security hospital.

As Mr Raab strides along the corridor, indecipherable shouts emerge from behind a cell door, suggesting word of his visit has spread. A TV room features a pool table and bookshelf. It boasts few, if any, literary classics but there is a fantasy novel, *Soul Of The Fire* by Terry Goodkind, a number of books by Ted Dekker, who has written Christian mystery thrillers, and the non-fiction work *Tea With Hezbollah*, about his attempts to better understand the Middle East.

A prison officer said that staff originally feared the wing would become a 'living nightmare' when it opened in 2017. There were some attacks on officers, but none since 2019. Prisoners previously refused to co-operate with deradicalisation programmes but some are now becoming more receptive.

'We try to minimise their contact with each other and stop them from communicating to other wings,' said one official. 'Their views are often entrenched and very difficult to shift. It's wrapped up in their whole status and being, they often don't have prospects for a regular life.'

The terrorists enjoy the same benefits as regular inmates, including fortnightly visits and CDs or games consoles for those with privileges. They can mix with each other on the wing but are allowed no access to other prisoners.

At the end of another corridor a stairway leads outside to a small exercise yard, reportedly the subject of a complaint by the International Red Cross over its small size, around 15ft by 25ft. Encased by metal caging on all sides, the roof of the yard is alarmed and covered by wiring to prevent any attempt at escape by helicopter. There are basketball nets and it could be used as a football pitch, though the prisoners ‘just walk around and around’ an officer said.

Monitoring of prison wings has often found noticeable improvements in inmates’ behaviour when the extremists have been removed, according to officials. A counter-terror intelligence unit has been established at the prison where experts build an intricate picture of terror offenders behind bars, not just in Frankland, but at other jails across the country.

Tucked away close to the office of acting governor Darren Finley, the team works out of a spare bedroom-sized office with wall charts mapping extremist inmates. One chart profiles the men held in Frankland’s ‘separation centre’. Another features profiles of more than 100 convicted terrorists across the country. Staff and specialist psychologists regularly feed back intelligence to track relationships developing between the extremists and ensure others do not fall into their orbit.

Gavin O’Malley, a former HMP Frankland governor who now oversees it along with five other Category A prisons in the north of England, said staff have to be constantly alert to the smallest details. ‘It could be a new tea pack that a prisoner has received, or that their pin credit [for phones] or canteen [weekly items] has gone. These are small signs that something’s changed,’ he explained.

‘This might not seem like anything to them [staff] but if it’s fed back it can build a picture and we can try to understand what’s happening, if someone is falling in with the wrong group.’ Senior prison officials at the jail told how staff have to constantly monitor groups and rivalries, which can flare into violence. They include traditional gangs and organised criminal groups, far-Right terrorists and the more organised, ‘hierarchical’ Muslim groups.

Prison officers have even identified cases in which gangsters have sought to ally themselves with high-profile terror offenders, identifying a business opportunity.

‘It’s because the terror offender will have sway over a large group of prisoners. That can be used by the OCG [organised criminal group] in a prison,’ explained Mr O’Malley to officials including Mr Raab.

Two years ago, the unit at Frankland was criticised in a review by prison watchdog the Independent Monitoring Board, which said: ‘The lack of engagement, and now the antagonism and hostility to staff, result in a lack of progression. Is the separation centre, initially conceived to be one of several, now viable in the successful management of these prisoners?’

Officials insist reforms introduced after the review have improved the situation. Mr O’Malley says the inmates also play a role. ‘We do rely on prisoners as well to keep a wing settled and those good relationships to maintain stability on the wing,’ he said.

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HEADLINE	02/04 Legal justification striking ISIS leader?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/04/biden-aumf-legal-justification/
GIST	<p>President Biden approved Thursday’s early-morning raid on a three-story building in northwestern Syria after U.S. intelligence concluded that Islamic State chief Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi was there and plotting the terrorist group's comeback.</p> <p>This was a more-than-sufficient basis for the deadly operation, according to how Biden — and, before him, Presidents Donald Trump and Barack Obama — interpreted the 2001 Authorization for Use of</p>

Military Force (AUMF), which Congress passed days after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks to broaden the president's powers to use military force in the Middle East.

Over the years, members of Congress have put forth proposals to update, revise or repeal the 2001 AUMF and a second one, passed in 2002, that authorized the invasion of Iraq. Biden has even [expressed his support](#) for putting more of the power to wage war back in Congress's hands.

But no changes have been made, and two decades later, the Qurayshi raid once more raises questions about Washington's continued, expansive use of the authorization.

"The U.S. position is really a recipe for endless war," said Adil Haque, a professor at Rutgers University and the executive editor of Just Security, a national security law blog. "The doctrine really allows for conflict that is endless in time and in space."

Just 60 words long, [the AUMF](#) authorized a U.S. president to go after al-Qaeda, the Taliban and anyone else responsible for the worst terrorist attack on U.S. soil "to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons."

Although the AUMF was specifically written with the perpetrators of 9/11 in mind, Obama argued in 2013 that it also applied to the then-rising Islamic State — which did not exist in 2001 — because it was an ["associated force"](#) of al-Qaeda.

This interpretation of the AUMF has since been the legal backbone for many other U.S. military operations, including in [Libya](#) and [Somalia](#), carried about by a president without congressional approval or oversight. It was similarly the legal basis for the deadly 2019 raid in Syria on Qurayshi's predecessor, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

By the time of Baghdadi's death, the Islamic State and al-Qaeda had undergone a very public split.

Luke Hartig, a fellow in the security program at the New America think tank and a former senior director for counterterrorism at the National Security Council, said he found the broad use of the 2001 AUMF "troubling," because the president's authority to use military force should "not be open-ended."

"It's important that the president and administration act under statutory basis," he said.

International treaties additionally govern the laws of war. The [United Nations charter](#) permits a member state to strike another as an act of self-defense, which it leaves vaguely defined. Even less clear is what this means about the legality of one country attacking a violent nonstate actor in the territory of another country without that country's approval.

In 2014, the Obama administration put forth a different legal rationale, arguing that U.S. operations against the Islamic State in Syria were permitted under international law because the Syrian government was itself ["unwilling or unable"](#) to stop the group from threatening the United States.

This interpretation also is "not without controversy," said Oona Hathaway, a professor of international law at Yale University and a former national security lawyer in the Defense Department's Office of General Counsel. "There are many [nations] who think that this is fairly weak."

A handful of key U.S. allies, such as Britain, Canada and Germany, have explicitly endorsed the "unwilling and unable" doctrine. A small contingent of countries, [including Mexico and Syria](#), have rejected it. Most nations have remained either silent or vague in their positions.

France, for example, has been ambiguous about how expansive the argument should be, although, along with Britain, it has joined U.S. operations in Syria, Hathaway said.

Although the raid on Qurayshi made international news, “legally speaking, this isn’t all that different from [U.S.] strikes that are pretty common in Syria against ISIS,” Hathaway said.

What it did, she said, is “bring attention to the fact that we are still very active in operations in Syria” and “operating under some very old legal theories that many think are pretty weak. ... It’s an occasion to revisit whether the president really has all the legal authority that he needs” to authorize such missions.

In describing the operation, Washington stressed that to minimize civilian casualties, U.S. forces raided the building rather than strike it from the air. Intelligence showed that an unrelated family lived on the bottom floor of the three-story building. The Pentagon said it evacuated six people who had been on the building’s first floor. U.S. officials additionally attributed the majority of deaths to a bomb they said Qurayshi detonated, killing himself and members of his family.

If the U.S. military narrative is accurate, said David Bosco, a professor at Indiana University’s Hamilton Lugar School of Global and International Studies, the efforts to minimize civilian casualties appeared to be in keeping with the Geneva Conventions, which regulate armed conflict.

But an additional ambiguity, said Haque, the Rutgers professor, is the question of what counts as an imminent threat, which has been generally accepted as grounds for invoking the right to self-defense.

This question was raised after the 2019 killing of Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani, whom the United States struck by drone near the Baghdad airport. The Trump administration said Soleimani was behind various plots against U.S. personnel in the region, which it considered sufficient justification.

Without clear guidance, said Haque, the U.S. position has effectively become that “as long as ISIS exists in some form and has some members saying threatening things on the Internet and they have some capability, then the United States could keep bombing another country where they are.”

Other countries also take cues from how Washington acts.

This week, Turkey’s military struck sites in Syria and Iraq belonging to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or PKK, and other affiliated groups that Ankara has banned. Turkey has repeatedly justified these cross-border raids using arguments similar to those relied on by the United States, said Haque.

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HEADLINE	02/04 Pentagon: lone bomber Kabul airport attack
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/04/us/politics/kabul-airport-attack-report.html
GIST	<p>A single Islamic State suicide bomber carried out the attack at Kabul’s international airport in August that killed 13 U.S. troops and as many as 170 civilians, and was not joined by accomplices firing into the crowd, according to a Pentagon report released on Friday.</p> <p>The findings by a team of Army-led investigators contradict initial reports by senior U.S. commanders that militants fired into the crowd of people at the airport seeking to flee the Afghan capital and caused some of the casualties.</p> <p>The report also absolved Marines of firing lethal shots into the crowd at the Abbey Gate entrance to the airport as some officials had suspected because of the large amount of ammunition the Marines fired after the attack, which took place on Aug. 26.</p> <p>“The investigation found no definitive proof that anyone was ever hit or killed by gunfire, either U.S. or Afghan,” Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., the head of the Central Command, told reporters in a video conference from his headquarters in Tampa, Fla.</p> <p>But the U.S. military’s assessment of what transpired highlights only a portion of what happened that day: Investigators did not speak to any Afghan witnesses and the chaos of the withdrawal left officials relying heavily on drone footage to reach their conclusions.</p>

The bombing capped 20 years of war in Afghanistan. Thirteen flag-draped coffins were flown to Dover Air Force Base in Delaware, and a succession of funerals were held across the country for U.S. service members, most of them under the age of 25.

“I’ve never been one for politics and I’m not going to start now,” Marilyn Soviak, the sister of [Maxton Soviak](#), a Navy corpsman from Ohio who was among the dead, posted on Instagram after the attack. “What I will say is that my beautiful, intelligent, beat-to-the-sound of his own drum, annoying, charming baby brother was killed yesterday helping to save lives.”

The accounts of what unfolded immediately after the attack — from the Pentagon and people on the ground — changed several times. Defense Department officials initially said that nearby fighters from Islamic State Khorasan, or ISIS-K, the terrorist group’s Afghan branch, began firing weapons. That turned out not to be true.

Some people near the scene said the Marines shot indiscriminately into the crowd, apparently believing they were under fire. That too, according to the accounting presented on Friday by Central Command, turned out not to be true, although investigators said British and American forces fired warning shots in the air.

But perhaps the biggest error after the Abbey Gate bombing would come just three days later. On Aug. 29, American officials, fearful that another suicide bomber would attack Hamid Karzai International Airport, launched a drone strike, hitting a white Toyota loaded with what turned out to be water canisters, not explosives. The officials who called in the strike had not noticed video footage that showed the presence of a child some two minutes before the strike.

In the end, 10 civilians, including seven children, were killed.

General McKenzie acknowledged on Friday that the Abbey Gate investigation reversed commanders’ initial assessments, noting “the battlefield is a confusing and contradictory place, and it gets more confusing the closer you are to the actual act.”

He said, for example, that “ball bearings caused wounds that looked like gunshots,” referring to the projectiles unleashed in the blast. In their monthslong inquiry, investigators relied on eyewitness testimony, medical examiners’ findings, and video footage from an MQ-9 drone flying overhead minutes after the blast.

The investigation also found that military leaders took appropriate measures to protect their forces throughout the operation at Abbey Gate, and that the medical services that were available and ready saved every life they possibly could have.

And the investigators said the decision to keep the Abbey Gate open late that afternoon — until the explosion at 5:36 p.m. — despite increasing threats of an ISIS attack, was understandable given that many Afghans with valid travel documents were still trying to evacuate and foreign allies were rushing to get their citizens out. Officials wanted to prevent throngs of Afghans overrunning the airfield, investigators said, as happened on Aug. 16 after the Afghan government fell to the Taliban.

“This was not preventable,” Brig. Gen. Lance Clark of the Army, a senior investigator, said of the bombing.

The investigation did not focus on the bomber himself, other than to note that it was “highly likely” that he circumvented Taliban checkpoints and used an alternate route to the airfield, bringing him within feet of the Abbey Gate checkpoint. Investigators found no evidence that the Taliban were complicit or negligent in the attack.

Investigators said the bomber detonated a 20-pound explosive, probably carried in a backpack or vest, spraying 5-millimeter ball bearings in a tremendous blast that was captured in grainy video images that were shown to reporters during a Pentagon briefing.

U.S. and foreign intelligence officials have pieced together a profile of the assailant, and a separate F.B.I. investigation is underway.

The Islamic State identified the suicide bomber as Abdul Rahman Al-Logari. American officials say he was a former engineering student who was one of several thousand militants freed from at least two high-security prisons after the Taliban seized control of Kabul on Aug. 15. The Taliban emptied the facilities indiscriminately, releasing not only their own imprisoned members but also fighters from ISIS-K, the Taliban's nemesis.

Mr. Logari was not unknown to the Americans. In 2017, the C.I.A. tipped off Indian intelligence agents that he was plotting a suicide bombing in New Delhi, U.S. officials said. Indian authorities foiled the attack and turned Mr. Logari over to the C.I.A., which sent him to Afghanistan to serve time at the Parwan prison at Bagram Air Base. He remained there until he was freed amid the chaos after Kabul fell.

Mr. Logari was the son of an Afghan merchant who frequently visited India and Pakistan for business. He moved to India in 2017 to study engineering, according to American and Indian authorities.

Recruited by ISIS-K, Mr. Logari was arrested in relation to the New Delhi plot and handed over to the C.I.A. by India's foreign spy service in September 2017, according to Indian media reports that were confirmed by American and Indian officials.

Mr. Logari spent time in both the Pul-e-Charki and Parwan prisons, American officials said, but it is unclear how he linked up with the ISIS-K attack cell in Kabul.

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HEADLINE	02/04 US raid killed ISIS leader: 5 takeaways
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/04/world/middleeast/islamic-state-syria-raid-takeaways.html
GIST	<p>The daring pre-dawn raid by U.S. Special Operations forces in Syria that resulted in the death of the Islamic State's leader offered a vivid reminder that no matter how much the world might want to move on, the chaos in Syria continues to reverberate.</p> <p>The sudden roar of American Apache attack helicopters in a pastoral patch of northwestern Syria gave way on Thursday to a firefight inside a three-story building surrounded by olive trees. The raid resulted in the death of the target, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, the largely unknown leader of the Islamic State, or ISIS, since 2019. U.S. officials said he blew himself up and killed 12 others as the commandos closed in.</p> <p>Mr. al-Qurayshi's death came days after American forces backed a Kurdish-led militia in a bloody, weeklong battle to oust ISIS fighters from a prison in northeastern Syria, the largest U.S. combat assault on the Islamic State since the end of the jihadists' so-called caliphate three years ago. That and the raid on Mr. al-Qurayshi has highlighted that the United States still cannot extricate itself completely from military engagement in Syria, and that its more than two-decade global fight against terrorist groups is far from over.</p> <p>Here are five takeaways from the raid:</p> <p>The U.S. fight against terrorism grinds on, with no end in sight.</p> <p>Years of military action by the United States and its international partners aimed at stamping out terrorism have exacted major tolls, first against Al Qaeda and then against the Islamic State, which rose from the turmoil of the Iraq war and the collapse of the Syrian state. But even as an untold number of fighters have been killed and leaders eliminated, both groups have adapted into more diffuse organizations, adept at finding new havens from which to launch opportunistic violence.</p>

The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan this summer, facilitated by the U.S. military's withdrawal, refocused international attention on the prospect of terrorists regaining the country as a haven. In Iraq, the Islamic State recently killed 10 soldiers and an officer at an army post and beheaded a police officer on camera. In Syria, it has assassinated scores of local leaders, extorting businesses to finance its operations.

In Afghanistan, the withdrawal of American forces in August left the local Islamic State affiliate to battle the Taliban, with often disastrous consequences for civilians caught in the middle.

"The recent attacks by ISIS," said Mick Mulroy, a former top Pentagon official and retired C.I.A. paramilitary operations officer, "indicate that ISIS is not done fighting, nor is the U.S. and our partners."

As the U.S. counterterrorism campaign evolves, commando operations remain rare.

American efforts to combat terrorism around the world in recent years have been mostly defined by airstrikes and drone warfare, which have also exacted a huge — [and largely unacknowledged](#) — toll on civilians.

The raid against Mr. al-Qurayshi was a reminder that the United States military retains the ability to carry out targeted commando operations, but they carry risks.

The operation by about two dozen helicopter-borne Special Operations troops in northwestern Syria — plotted for months, executed on a moonless night and monitored on video screens from the White House Situation Room — bore striking similarities to the U.S. raids that killed Osama bin Laden in Pakistan in 2011 and the former Islamic State leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, in the same part of Syria in 2019.

But because of the extensive planning and risks to troops that they entail, such raids are reserved for the most important targets.

U.S. officials said they took care to avoid civilian casualties, evacuating 10 children from the building during the raid. That explosion appears to have been responsible for at least some of the 13 deaths in the operation, officials said.

But in complex raids, the military's initial version of events may be incomplete. Accounts of past operations have at times turned out to be contradictory or wrong, and the Pentagon said it was still collecting information from the raid.

Chaos in Syria offers jihadists a haven.

President Bashar al-Assad has held onto power despite a decade-long civil war, but the Syrian state is a mess, with pockets of the country beyond his control and an [illegal drug empire](#) flourishing in government-held areas. A New York Times investigation last year found that Syrian elites with ties to Mr. al-Assad are behind a multibillion-dollar industry trafficking an [illicit amphetamine](#) that has become country's most valuable export, far surpassing its legal products.

The raid on Thursday took place in the Atmeh area, a rural backwater and smuggling town in the northwest that has swelled in population during the war. As tens of thousands of Syrians were displaced, huge camps sprang up, and analysts say jihadists have often hidden among civilians struggling to survive.

Atmeh is in Idlib Province, which remains home to many violent extremist groups, dominated by Hayat Tahrir al Sham, formerly the Nusra Front, which was previously linked to Al Qaeda.

Another security vacuum exists in northeastern Syria, where jihadists have found refuge by evading Kurdish-led militias supported by the United States near the border with Turkey and in the desert that spans the border with Iraq.

Days before the raid, American forces backed a Kurdish-led militia in the city of Hasaka as it fought for more than a week to [oust Islamic State fighters from a prison](#) they had occupied. The battle [killed hundreds of people](#) and offered a reminder of the group's ability to sow chaotic violence.

It was a victory for Biden amid other crises abroad.

As he confronts Russia over its military buildup on the borders with Ukraine and faces a deepening rivalry with China — as well as domestic challenges including rising inflation and an intransigent Republican opposition in Congress — President Biden secured a political victory with the mission in Syria. It eliminated one of the world's most wanted terrorist leaders with no loss of American life, according to U.S. officials.

After Afghanistan fell to the Taliban, critics of Mr. Biden said that his military withdrawal from the country would hamper intelligence gathering against terrorist networks. The hunt for Mr. al-Qurayshi, whom intelligence officials had been tracking since last year, offered evidence that the United States retained the ability to track jihadist leaders in Syria.

White House aides said that top Pentagon officials and military commanders apprised Mr. Biden of their planning, at one point presenting a tabletop model of the building where the Islamic State leader and his family lived — and noting that a Syrian family with no apparent connection to the terrorist group was living on the first floor.

Mindful of the high risk of harm to civilians and to the commandos, military engineers told Mr. Biden that they did not believe the entire building would collapse if Mr. al-Qurayshi detonated a suicide vest or other explosives on the third floor, according to an account from two Biden administration officials. In the end, Mr. Biden said, Mr. al-Qurayshi died when he exploded a bomb that killed him as well as members of his own family.

The death of Mr. al-Qurayshi allows Mr. Biden, like his predecessors in the Oval Office, to claim credit for eliminating a jihadist leader whose group is responsible for numerous civilian deaths in Syria and Iraq, and for deadly terrorist attacks around the world.

ISIS will probably persist, even without a unifying leader.

At the height of its powers around 2015, the Islamic State controlled a portion of Syria and Iraq that was about the size of Britain. It lured droves of foreign fighters from as far away as China and Australia and ran a sophisticated propaganda machine that inspired or directed foreign attacks from Berlin [to San Bernardino, Calif.](#) By December 2017, after a sustained U.S.-led military campaign, it had lost 95 percent of its territory.

The fight continued as an American-led coalition joined with local forces in Syria and Iraq to roll back the group's gains. A Kurdish-led militia, the Syrian Democratic Forces, with American military support, pushed it from its last patch of territory in northeast Syria in early 2019. In October that year, the U.S. raid killed the group's leader, Mr. [al-Baghdadi](#).

After Mr. al-Qurayshi replaced Mr. al-Baghdadi, the United States put a bounty of up to \$10 million on his head. Mr. al-Qurayshi kept a low profile to evade capture, which analysts said prevented him from expanding the group's reach. But the group has evolved to the point that one man's death does not mean it is no longer a threat.

"I don't think anyone should be under the illusion that removing him from the organization is a death blow to Islamic State," said Daniel Milton, the director of research at West Point's Combating Terrorism Center. "This hopefully will hamper the organization, but I don't think it will eliminate the threat in the future."

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HEADLINE	02/04 Panel: repatriate 9/11 Gitmo detainee
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/04/us/politics/quantanamo-detainee-transfer.html

WASHINGTON — The case of a mentally ill detainee at Guantánamo Bay, Mohammed al-Qahtani, has long confounded the United States government. Suspected of being Al Qaeda's intended 20th hijacker in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, he was tortured by military interrogators early in his detention at the American naval base in Cuba.

A senior Pentagon official later determined that, because of how Mr. Qahtani was initially treated, he could not be prosecuted. Security officials also considered him too dangerous to release, so he has remained detained for two decades.

On Friday, the Pentagon said that a [parole-like board had recommended](#) repatriating Mr. Qahtani to Saudi Arabia to a custodial rehabilitation and mental health care program for extremists. The Biden administration is expected to send him there as early as March.

The move followed a report last spring by a Navy doctor who concluded that [Mr. Qahtani](#), who is in his 40s, should be transferred because he could not receive the medical treatment he needed at Guantánamo and was too impaired to pose a future threat — especially if he was sent to inpatient mental care, according to people briefed on that report.

In June, the Periodic Review Board, a six-agency panel that reviews the cases of uncharged Guantánamo prisoners, unanimously adopted that recommendation, according to officials. But the Biden administration, apparently while it negotiated a security agreement with Saudi Arabia for Mr. Qahtani's repatriation, held off on making the decision public until Friday.

"The board recognizes the detainee presents some level of threat in light of his past activities and associations," the panel said, explaining why it believed that threat could be "adequately mitigated," making his continued indefinite detention unnecessary.

Among them, it cited Mr. Qahtani's "significantly compromised mental health condition." It also cited his "available family support" and Saudi Arabia's ability to provide "comprehensive mental health care," as well as its ability to monitor him and restrict his travel if he completes treatment.

Ramzi Kassem, a lawyer for Mr. Qahtani and a law professor at the City University of New York, called the decision to recommend his client's transfer "long overdue." He cited his client's serious mental illness, including repeated recent suicide attempts.

"Despite the severity of his illness, Mohammed doesn't pose a risk to anyone but himself," Mr. Kassem said. "He needs psychiatric treatment in Saudi Arabia, not continued incarceration in Cuba."

Mr. Qahtani is one of [39 detainees left at the wartime prison](#), and is one of 19 who have been recommended for transfer subject to security arrangements. By law, Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III must tell Congress 30 days before any such transfer that he is satisfied with the agreement.

But most of those 19 detainees cannot be sent home because they come from unstable countries like Yemen and Somalia, which by law cannot receive Guantánamo detainees. So the Biden administration must find other countries willing to take them. Because Mr. Qahtani can be repatriated, he could be the first to leave.

Mr. Qahtani's notoriety is linked to his attempt to enter the United States on Aug. 4, 2001, when an immigration inspector at the Orlando airport turned him away. The authorities later discovered that Mohamed Atta — a ringleader of the attack carried out by 19 hijackers that killed nearly 3,000 people the next month — had come to meet him there.

The circumstances led the authorities to believe that Al Qaeda had sent Mr. Qahtani to serve as a member of the team that hijacked United Airlines Flight 93. Passengers on the flight fought back and caused the plane to crash into a Pennsylvania field rather than its likely intended target, the U.S. Capitol.

(Mr. Qahtani has never been tried or convicted of being part of that conspiracy. Even if he had been, it is not clear whether Mr. Qahtani, who sustained a traumatic brain injury as a youth and was diagnosed with schizophrenia before he tried to enter the United States, had any specific knowledge of what the government suspects Mr. Atta was planning for him.)

By the time the United States invaded Afghanistan in response to the Sept. 11 attacks, Mr. Qahtani had drifted into jihadi circles and was captured along the Pakistani frontier in December 2001 with a group of foreign fighters. He and those believed to be bodyguards to Osama bin Laden were sent to Guantánamo in early 2002.

Later that year, the U.S. military recognized that he might be no ordinary detainee. With authorization from Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, he was forced to undergo two months of continuous, brutal interrogation by the U.S. military inside a wooden hut at Camp X-Ray in [late 2002 and early 2003](#).

[Hour-by-hour logs](#) leaked to Time magazine showed military interrogators placed Mr. Qahtani in solitary confinement, stripped him naked, forcibly shaved him, and subjected him to prolonged sleep deprivation, dehydration, exposure to cold, and various psychological and sexual humiliations like making him bark like a dog, dance with a man and wear women's underwear on his head. They extracted a confession, which he later recanted.

Mr. Qahtani's treatment was so degrading and abusive that the Bush administration official overseeing military commissions, Susan J. Crawford, concluded in 2008 that he could not be prosecuted. Because "we tortured" him, she [told The Washington Post that year](#), she refused to authorize his capital prosecution with Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, the self-described mastermind of the attacks, and four other detainees accused of aiding them.

Mr. Mohammed and the four other men — whose [case at the military commissions system](#) has been in pretrial hearings for nearly a decade — were also tortured in American custody. But that occurred in the overseas prisons of the C.I.A., with graphic descriptions emerging years after Ms. Crawford's decision about Mr. Qahtani. Their torture by the C.I.A. has been a major issue in that case.

As early as 2009, then Vice President-elect Joseph R. Biden Jr. recognized the conundrum surrounding Mr. Qahtani. "We're inheriting a very difficult situation," [he said days before assuming office](#). "Not all of it is clear cut."

As vice president, former administration officials recall, Mr. Biden was dedicated to President Barack Obama's commitment to ending detention operations at Guantánamo, including [personally asking foreign leaders to help resettle detainees who could not go home](#). While Congress enacted a law that thwarted Mr. Obama's plan to close the prison by transferring some detainees to a different facility in the United States, the administration still managed to greatly winnow down the number of prisoners there.

[The only detainee to leave the prison](#) under President Donald J. Trump was also transferred to detention in Saudi Arabia. A year into Mr. Biden's presidency, his administration has [transferred just one more](#) out. Mr. Biden has described closing the facility as a policy goal, but he has not pushed Congress to rescind the law that prevents bringing any detainees to high-security prisons on domestic soil or appointed a special envoy to negotiate transfer deals, as the Obama administration had.

Mr. Qahtani's approval for repatriation follows litigation by his defense lawyers, Mr. Kassem and Shayana Kadidal of the Center for Constitutional Rights. They have argued that he deserves to be released to Saudi Arabia on medical grounds under both the Geneva Conventions and a U.S. Army regulation.

His lawyers enlisted a psychiatrist who treats U.S. military veterans for post-traumatic stress, Emily Keram, to evaluate Mr. Qahtani over the years, starting in 2015. Dr. Keram also scrutinized his records from Saudi Arabia showing that he had undergone an acute psychotic break there attributed to schizophrenia long before he arrived at Guantánamo.

The torture only made him sicker, the psychiatrist wrote in a series of reports to the court, and Mr. Qahtani distrusts American military health providers, most likely because military medics were used at his interrogations. He has refused psychotropic medication and in recent years repeatedly tried to kill himself, including by hanging, cutting and swallowing broken glass, court documents show.

In 2020, based on Dr. Keram's work, [a federal judge ordered an independent examination](#) by a three-doctor panel, two of them foreigners. The Trump Justice Department resisted that order, which would have been the first foreign medical intervention at the wartime prison.

Instead, Congress created a position of a Navy doctor who would be assigned to the base but who would work independently. Mr. Qahtani's lawyers agreed to put off resolving the court case while that official scrutinized the military's medical records and Dr. Keram's findings. The government has a deadline on Monday to tell the court its position on the judge's order requiring an independent examination.

In May, the Navy doctor, Corry J. Kucik, concurred with Dr. Keram's findings, according to people familiar with a seven-page report he prepared for the Periodic Review Board.

Dr. Kucik agreed that Mr. Qahtani was damaged by his childhood brain injury and the schizophrenia he developed as an adolescent, and that his abusive interrogation and subsequent continued confinement had only aggravated that.

Dr. Kucik, the people said, also agreed that Mr. Qahtani could not be adequately treated at Guantánamo, and that he was extremely unlikely to pose any threat if sent to a Saudi mental hospital near his family where his mental health could be more effectively addressed.

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HEADLINE	02/05 Leader death a blow to ISIS; hardly the end
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/05/world/middleeast/isis-qurayshi-death.html
GIST	<p>BEIRUT, Lebanon — For a man who sought to disappear, the leader of the Islamic State seemed to have done everything right.</p> <p>He hid out far from where his enemies expected. He never left the house, relying on trusted couriers to communicate with his far-flung underlings. He was the group's only leader to never issue a video or voice address, for fear it would make him easier to track. Most of his most fervent followers would not have recognized him on the street.</p> <p>But American commandos came for him anyway, and on Thursday, the leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, blew himself up during a raid on his hide-out in northwestern Syria, U.S. officials said.</p> <p>American leaders hailed Mr. al-Qurayshi's death as a fresh wound to a fearsome organization whose reach and power had already been greatly diminished. But terrorism analysts warned that killing yet another leader would not erase a group whose members have continued to seek refuge and plan attacks in chaotic parts of the globe.</p> <p>"It is another painful blow to an organization that just a few years ago cast a broad shadow across the entire region," said Pratibha Thaker, the editorial director for the Middle East and Africa at the Economist Intelligence Unit. "But I think everyone is wondering deep down how much taking down the top leader really matters since the organization is very decentralized."</p> <p>The United States has invested great resources in killing leaders of terrorist organizations. American forces took out Osama bin Laden, the founder of Al Qaeda, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who led Al Qaeda in Iraq, and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Mr. al-Qurayshi's predecessor at the helm of the Islamic State.</p> <p>While such attacks generate dramatic headlines, the groups they sought to undermine have often resurfaced in new and more powerful forms or simply replaced old heads with new ones, Hydra-style.</p>

The killing of Mr. al-Qurayshi deprived the Islamic State of a key religious and military authority at a time when the group had already been routed from its territory and lost a huge number of fighters. Now it faces a potential leadership vacuum.

But terrorism experts said the group had become more diffuse and decentralized, allowing it to carry on. Even if it no longer has the power to hold territory as it once did, diminishing its ability to market itself as a “state,” it has proved that it can still carry out devastating coordinated military attacks.

In recent weeks, its fighters in Iraq killed 10 Iraqi soldiers and an officer in a nighttime attack on an army post and beheaded a police officer on camera. In Syria, the jihadists [attacked a prison](#) in an attempt to free thousands of their former comrades and occupied the compound for more than a week before a Kurdish-led militia supported by the United States drove them out.

Still, the group is a shadow of its former self.

At its height around 2015, ISIS controlled a territory the size of Britain in Syria and Iraq and displaced Al Qaeda as the world’s richest and most dangerous terrorist organization. It controlled large cities, collected taxes, provided public services and built a war machine.

Its propagandists attracted aspiring jihadists from around the world. Its operatives directed and inspired deadly attacks in the United States, Europe and elsewhere.

The loss of its last patch of territory in 2019, after four and a half years of war, [was a major defeat](#). Now, it is a caliphate in name only. And persistent attacks by the United States and its partners in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere have disrupted its financing networks and led to the deaths of many of its cadres.

Mr. al-Qurayshi was anointed the group’s leader, or caliph, in 2019 after his predecessor, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, similarly blew himself up during a raid by U.S. Special Forces on his hide-out in northwestern Syria.

From the start, Mr. al-Qurayshi lacked his predecessor’s public profile, and even his followers knew little about his background. The United States filled in some gaps by releasing notes of interrogation sessions from when he was detained by U.S. forces in Iraq in 2008.

But the revelations that he said he had served in the Iraqi Army under Saddam Hussein and earned a master’s degree in Islamic studies in 2007 were overshadowed by what appeared to be his willingness to inform on his fellow jihadists.

After Mr. al-Qurayshi took control of ISIS, the United States put [a bounty of up to \\$10 million](#) on his head and said he “helped drive and justify the abduction, slaughter and trafficking of members of Yazidi religious minority groups” in Iraq and oversaw “the group’s global operations.”

As it searches for a replacement, ISIS no longer has a large pool to draw from because years of concerted counterterrorism operations by the United States and its partners have killed so much of the group’s inner circle, the ISIS expert Hassan Hassan [wrote Thursday in New Lines](#), an online magazine.

“The leaders it can trust are a dying breed — quite literally,” he wrote.

That leadership vacuum, the waning attractiveness of international jihadism and the increasing strength of enemy governments and competing militant groups could hinder the group’s ability to bounce back, he wrote. “The death of its leader under these circumstances will further disorient the group and weaken its ability to focus on international terrorism.”

The group already appears to be less dangerous in Iraq, according to a recent [analysis of attack data](#) by Michael Knights, the Jill and Jay Bernstein Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and his colleague, Alex Almeida.

They found that ISIS attacks increased in 2019 and 2020, but have declined since, in both quantity and quality.

“For now, at the outset of 2022, the Islamic State insurgency in Iraq is at a very low ebb, with recorded attack numbers that rival the lowest ever recorded,” they wrote.

They said increased Iraqi security deployments in rural areas, frequent counterterrorism raids and “decapitation strikes” against ISIS leaders had contributed to the decline.

But terrorism analysts hesitate to write off the group, noting that it was regarded as a spent force just a few years before it came roaring back and solidified its control over entire cities in Syria and Iraq in 2014.

The group has long found it easiest to operate in failed states, conflict zones and poorly governed places, and its fighters still have many such territories to choose from, including [in Afghanistan](#) and [parts of Africa](#).

In Syria, it remains most active in the east, which was badly battered in the country’s 10-year civil war and is only loosely controlled by a Kurdish-led militia whose administration is not internationally recognized and is short on resources.

The draw of chaotic places likely explains why Mr. al-Qurayshi sought refuge in Idlib Province, in Syria’s northwest, miles from his organization’s past strongholds.

The area is one of the last territories still controlled by the rebels who set out to topple President Bashar al-Assad, and it is packed with millions of people who fled from elsewhere during the war, making it easier for strangers to blend in.

The Islamic State’s future could depend less on who its leaders are than on the opportunities for expansion that present themselves, and the group’s ability to take advantage of them.

“What we have seen in the jihadi movement on the whole over the last two decades is that it is highly pragmatic in the pursuit of its goals,” said Shiraz Maher, the author of [a book on the history of the global jihadist movement](#). “Their next move is to continue to hold out and bide their time and react to the realities as they pan out.”

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	02/07 Climate activists glue selves to roadway
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/group-11-climate-activists-glue-themselves-berlin-motorway-2022-02-07/
GIST	<p>BERLIN, Feb 7 (Reuters) - Eleven climate activists glued themselves to the asphalt of the German capital's main motorway, causing rush hour traffic jams on Monday, in the latest protest demanding a law against food waste and cuts in greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture.</p> <p>Activists from the group "Last Generation", who also placed food on the A100 motorway that had been discarded earlier, previously blocked roads and motorways in Berlin, Hamburg and Stuttgart on several occasions last week.</p> <p>A Reuters video showed some frustrated motorists getting out of their cars and pulling activists out of the way by their hoods and backpacks to allow vehicles to pass.</p>

	<p>There will be further blockades in other German cities later on Monday, Last Generation said in a statement.</p> <p>By 1000 GMT, activists had blocked three motorway entrances in three places in Berlin and made one unsuccessful attempt, a police spokesperson said.</p> <p>So far, 27 activists had taken part in blockades, 11 of whom glued themselves to the asphalt, the spokesperson said.</p> <p>Police on Monday were verifying the activists' identities and checking if they could be placed in custody, the spokesperson said.</p> <p>She added she was could not immediately say how many people had been detained since the beginning of the protests. According to information from the group's website, there were 50 people in custody in different German cities by the end of day on Friday.</p> <p>"By planning to achieve climate neutrality by 2045, the German government breaks its constitutional obligation to protect our lives," activist Carla Hinrichs said in a statement.</p> <p>"By 2030, we will exceed 1.5 degrees (average rise in global temperatures). The government is not only breaking international law but committing a crime against humanity by deliberately heading for a world hotter by 2, 3, 4 degrees with billions dying of hunger," Hinrichs said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/06 Airlines face unexpected rise in bird strikes
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/airlines-face-unexpected-safety-issue-in-pandemic-more-bird-strikes-11644148801?mod=hp_list_pos2
GIST	<p>Airlines are contending with an unexpected consequence of the pandemic: a rising rate in bird collisions.</p> <p>Called “bird strikes” in the industry, such collisions are rare, but potentially dangerous. A flock of birds crippled both engines of the jet that Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger safely ditched in the Hudson River in 2009. Most collisions are less catastrophic, but airports and pilots train extensively to avoid them.</p> <p>Airport executives, safety agencies and wildlife biologists blame quiet airports over the past two years for the rising rate of strikes. Airports handled many fewer flights, and in some cases, smaller fields weren’t used at all for long stretches. Birds moved in, nesting atop parked aircraft, inside engines and on unused gear like passenger bridges and boarding stairs.</p> <p>Geese have been a problem at Portland International Airport in Oregon. Seagulls flocked to Rome-Fiumicino Airport. Black kites are a new hazard for pilots taking off and landing in Bangalore.</p> <p>“There has been a significant increase in risk,” said Phil Mountain, director of U.K.-based Birdstrike Management Ltd., which advises airlines and airports on mitigating wildlife risks. Aviation and wildlife officials around the world have documented or modeled sometimes-steep increases in incident rates, though data is often collected differently country by country, making it difficult to put a figure on the issue at a global level.</p> <p>Aviation industry officials haven’t seen an increase in damaging accidents despite the rising rate of collisions. In the U.S., though, officials noted a substantial rise in the number of bigger bird species involved in collisions. Bald eagles, whose numbers have grown in the U.S. overall, were involved in 44 strikes with aircraft last year, up from the previous record of 35 for each of 2020 and 2019, according to Richard Dolbeer, a wildlife adviser at the U.S. Agriculture Department.</p>

In October last year, an engine on a [Spirit Airlines](#) Inc. flight caught fire after it ingested a bald eagle during a takeoff from Atlantic City International Airport, according to Federal Aviation Administration records. The flight was aborted, and passengers evacuated via slides. The strike caused major damage to the engine's fan blades.

Airports were already attractive for certain wildlife because of their large green spaces, said Marta Giordano, an ornithologist at the French Civil Aviation Authority. She co-authored a safety advisory published in July 2020 on handling the rise in bird strikes for European airports. "The fact that they were quiet made them even more attractive," she said.

The increased rate of collisions has been more notable in Europe, where a hodgepodge of national travel bans have restricted intercontinental flying much more severely than in the U.S. In the first quarter of 2021, the rate of strikes in Europe jumped 205% compared with the same quarter in 2020, according to Europe's counterpart to the FAA, the European Union Aviation Safety Agency. For the third quarter of last year, the latest period for which data is available, the number of bird strikes was up more than 18% from the same quarter in 2019, at 240.8 strikes per million flights.

"The challenges have been almost directly in proportion to the level of activity," said John Franklin, head of safety promotion at EASA. The drop-off in air traffic also led many airports to cut back funding for [wildlife mitigation measures](#), according to aviation officials and bird-mitigation experts.

In the U.S., bird-strike rates rose sharply early in the pandemic. As domestic traffic largely resumed across the country, rates have fallen back to historical levels, according to data modeling by academics and wildlife specialists at the Agriculture Department. The model found that strike rates increased by as much as 17.5% across a sample of U.S. airports between April 2020 and October of the same year.

They returned to historical levels by that winter. The model showed a 41% increase in excess strikes reported in June 2020, at the peak of the pandemic's impact on aircraft movements in the U.S.

Geese posed a problem in Portland International Airport. Gaggles resided on properties surrounding the airport, said Nick Atwell, senior wildlife manager for the Port of Portland and chairman of Bird Strike Committee USA, a volunteer group of wildlife specialists who advocate for measures to reduce bird-strike risk.

The rate of recorded bird strikes at the airport from April through June 2020 rose 122%, according to FAA data compiled by The Wall Street Journal. Bird strikes—even nonserious ones—can be costly for airlines. Most require a review for any damage by qualified maintenance teams, which can lead to delays or canceled flights.

On April 12, 2020, a Delta Air Lines Inc. jet at San Francisco International Airport started losing thrust in its second engine, causing the aircraft to return to the gate. The flight was canceled and the aircraft was temporarily removed from service. The airline later found a bird had been ingested by the turbine.

Rome-Fiumicino Airport recorded a 130% spike in the rate of bird collisions in the 12 months from March 2020, according to data collected by the airport and compiled from the Italian Bird Strike Index, which records wildlife collisions in Italy and is managed by the local civil aviation authority. Across Italy's 45 airports, the rate per 10,000 flights rose by 42%. Seagulls have posed a particular problem at Italy's coastal airports.

Rome's airport has deployed a range of measures to make it less attractive, including keeping grass cut short and water covered up, according to Marco Pellegrino, head of airside operations at Aeroporti di Roma SpA. A dedicated bird-control unit employs some 120 air cannons, sound cannons, hand-held lasers and vehicles equipped with sound systems to help keep wildlife from the runway.

Bangalore International Airport, meanwhile, recorded a 33% increase in movements of potentially hazardous birds. Regular food sources around the airport dried up during Covid-19 lockdowns, according to Haridasan Vadakkotil, a manager at the airport's strike hazard management team.

The airport has seen a particular rise in the number of black kites. The birds use thermal winds generated from runways to gain flight. "Birds quickly get adapted to the environment," he said, "and it's difficult to break their habit and keep them away."

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HEADLINE	02/06 Man 'tricked' woman; imposter DEA agent
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/06/us/portland-dea-imposter.html
GIST	<p>Suspensions arose last week when Sgt. Matthew Jacobsen of the Portland Police Bureau in Oregon saw a man and woman standing near a silver Dodge Charger with red and blue emergency lights and a tactical vest in its trunk with a "D.E.A. POLICE" patch.</p> <p>Sergeant Jacobsen asked them if they were federal agents with the Drug Enforcement Administration, according to a federal complaint. The man, Robert Edward Golden, replied that they were indeed "feds," according to the complaint.</p> <p>It was not exactly clear what it was about the pair that first attracted the sergeant's attention on the night of Feb. 1, but the authorities later learned that Mr. Golden, 41, was an impostor who had tricked the woman into believing that she was training to be a D.E.A. agent herself, according to the complaint filed on Thursday in U.S. District Court in Oregon.</p> <p>Mr. Golden had duped the woman, who was not named in the complaint, for about a year.</p> <p>He gave her a D.E.A. badge to use on ride-alongs at night, when he would take her to speak with homeless people to turn them into "confidential informants," and he spoke about his D.E.A. colleagues, like "Anderson" and "Luis," according to the complaint.</p> <p>Morgan T. Barr, a D.E.A. agent in Portland, said in the complaint that there were several discrepancies in Mr. Golden's portrayal of the profession: The agency does not provide ride-alongs, and it had no "Anderson" or "Luis" working in its district office.</p> <p>Mr. Golden was charged with impersonating a federal agent. The woman was not charged. Mr. Golden's lawyer, Michael Charles Benson, could not be immediately reached for comment on Sunday. The case was reported by The Daily Beast and The Oregonian on Friday.</p> <p>Sgt. Jacobsen, who could not be reached on Sunday, found more items in Mr. Golden's possession that burnished his appearance as a bona fide agent, such as handcuffs, badges, holsters and an AR-15-style rifle that was later determined to be a BB gun.</p> <p>Mr. Golden told the authorities he had fake D.E.A. patches, which he said he purchased on websites like eBay and Amazon, because he and the woman were "into cosplay," according to the complaint.</p> <p>As for the Dodge Charger with the red and blue emergency vehicle lights, the complaint said that Mr. Golden told the authorities that he wanted to make others believe that he and the woman were federal agents so no one would bother them near their apartment complex.</p> <p>He told investigators that he used the red and blue lights, which were inside the car, "to get through traffic faster," according to the complaint, and he said that he once acted like an officer to break up a fight by shouting "police!"</p>

	<p>The woman told investigators that she attended school for criminal justice and had been given credentials by Mr. Golden. He had taken her to shooting practice and once claimed that he had put someone in handcuffs on his way to work, according to the complaint.</p> <p>Mr. Barr, who could not be reached for comment on Sunday, said in the complaint that he believed that Mr. Golden had “tricked” the woman into believing that he “is in fact a D.E.A. agent and she is in fact in training to be a D.E.A. agent.”</p> <p>On Friday, U.S. Magistrate Judge Jolie A. Russo released Mr. Golden after imposing a number of conditions, including that he maintain a full-time job, limit his travel to Oregon unless granted approval by the court, and participate in counseling and a mental health evaluation.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/07 China tennis player Peng meets IOC leader
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/06/sports/olympics/peng-shuai-olympics-ioc.html
GIST	<p>Peng Shuai, the Chinese tennis player who largely disappeared from public life after making sexual abuse accusations against a political official in November, held a private meeting with Thomas Bach, the president of the International Olympic Committee, in Beijing over the weekend.</p> <p>The two had dinner on Saturday at the Olympic Club and were joined by Kirsty Coventry, the former chair of the Athletes’ Commission and an I.O.C. member, according to a statement released by the I.O.C. on Monday.</p> <p>The statement did not address Peng’s sexual assault accusations or the possibility of Bach pressing for an investigation of Peng’s claims, but it said that Peng was at the Winter Olympics and attending events, including a curling match between China and Norway on Saturday night.</p> <p>The revelation of the meeting might do little to satisfy critics who question whether Peng has been speaking freely in her sporadic and seemingly highly orchestrated public appearances over the past few weeks.</p> <p>Mark Adams, a spokesman for the I.O.C., declined to say on Monday whether the committee believed Peng’s initial claim that she had been sexually assaulted. She made the claim in November on a verified account on a Chinese social media platform, but has since recanted. Adams also declined to say whether the committee believed she was speaking under duress from government officials.</p> <p>“I don’t think it’s a judgment for the I.O.C. to make — we are a sporting organization,” Adams said at the I.O.C.’s daily news conference in Beijing.</p> <p>He noted that the organization had remained in constant communication with Peng in recent weeks to ensure that she was physically safe.</p> <p>“I don’t think it’s up to us to be able to judge, just as it’s not for you to judge, either, in one way or another, her position,” he said.</p> <p>Peng’s disappearance from public view late last year prompted a global chorus of concern for her safety. In November, the I.O.C. scheduled a video call between Bach and Peng that confirmed she was in China and apparently unharmed. The organization did not release a transcript of that call and has not released transcripts or recordings of any of its subsequent interactions with Peng.</p> <p>On Saturday, according to the I.O.C., Peng told Bach that she was disappointed that she hadn’t qualified for the Summer Olympics in Tokyo last summer, but planned to travel to Europe “once the pandemic was over.” It added that Coventry and Peng would remain in contact and that “all three agreed that any further communication about the content of the meeting would be left to her discretion.”</p>

Bach had said last week that the I.O.C. would call for an official inquiry into Peng's initial sexual assault accusations only if she had asked them to do so.

In response to a question about whether the I.O.C. had discussed a potential investigation with anyone, Adams referred journalists on Monday to an interview Peng conducted with L'Equipe, a French sports daily, that was published Monday. In it, Peng once again claimed that the situation, and her accusation, had been a misunderstanding.

The hourlong interview with Peng, according to L'Equipe, was arranged on Sunday by China's Olympic committee. The newspaper said it had been required to submit questions for Peng in advance, and her comments in Chinese were translated by a Chinese Olympic committee official.

"Sexual assault? I never said that anyone made me submit to a sexual assault," Peng said, according to L'Equipe. "This post resulted in an enormous misunderstanding from the outside world," she added. "My wish is that the meaning of this post no longer be skewed."

Peng was asked why her original post containing the sexual assault accusation had been erased from her account.

"I erased it," she said, adding: "Why? Because I wanted to."

She also told the newspaper that she was retiring from tennis.

Bach was not made available to comment on Monday. The I.O.C. said he was outside the city, watching downhill skiing, biathlon and ski jumping competitions.

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HEADLINE	02/05 Wild battle over Mexico resort hotel
SOURCE	https://news.yahoo.com/armed-raids-crooked-cops-wild-020204546.html
GIST	<p>TULUM, Mexico—Mexican police officers arrived at the American-owned beachfront hotel called El Pez, just outside the high-end resort town of Tulum, at about 3 a.m.</p> <p>Some 20 officers in body armor and carrying assault rifles entered El Pez and began going from room to room, pounding on doors, forcing sleepy guests out into the street at gunpoint. According to hotel staff, the officers also began dismantling the hotel's security cameras, apparently because they feared being recorded on the premises.</p> <p>Because some of the officers were in plain clothes and driving unmarked vehicles, some of the staff initially mistook them for cartel hitmen.</p> <p>"I thought there was going to be a confrontation between [rival drug gangs]," said the concierge who was on duty that Oct. 1 night, who we'll call Rolando, in an interview with The Daily Beast. "I thought I would never get out of there alive."</p> <p>El Pez sits on a pristine, flour-white stretch of beach near the town of Tulum on Mexico's Caribbean coast. It's known as a luxury boutique hotel valued at almost US\$20 million. Traditional thatched roofs outside, but with up-scale decor in the rooms. Balconies that look out over palm groves and the sea. All situated a few minutes from some of the most iconic Mayan ruins in the country. Not the kind of place where well-heeled guests expect armed men to throw them out in the middle of the night.</p> <p>When questioned by hotel staff, the cops allegedly said they had received an anonymous tip from a guest claiming shots had been fired on the beach outside the hotel. But, strangely, according to Rolando, none of the other guests or staff had reported any gunfire.</p>

“Neither I, nor any of the security guards heard anything,” Rolando said. “At that moment I communicated with [the guards] by radio and the answer was negative and it is a very quiet area where it would be easy to distinguish [gun shots].”

The officers claimed to have recovered small amounts of marijuana and cocaine, as well as a revolver and ammunition from one room, according to Mexican news outlet [ContraRéplica](#). They also reportedly took one of the guests into custody, without saying why.

“The whole thing was a set-up,” Rolando said. He believes the drugs were planted and that the man who was arrested may have been a “sacrificial sheep” intended to give a bogus raid the air of authenticity. “He wasn’t even in handcuffs when they took him out,” Rolando said. “Meanwhile the officers were... acting intimidating and pushing us around.”

Rolando’s fears of police malfeasance and the potential threat to life and limb are well founded. Mexican cops are notoriously corrupt, and often work together with organized crime groups. They’re also known to participate in extrajudicial killings—sometimes on a massive scale. Given the state of policing in Mexico, it’s not a stretch to say that the raid that night could have turned deadly at any moment.

“[The officers] never identified themselves and they were evasive every time we asked what they were doing and why,” Rolando said. “They used their firearms to frighten the staff even though we had nothing to do with the situation.”

Before the officers left that night they cordoned off the hotel, and, as of this writing, El Pez [remains closed](#). That is in stark contrast to other establishments in the region that have been the [scene of fatal shootouts](#) between [warring cartels](#), yet are then allowed to open up again almost at once.

“We have seen that justice has been selective,” said Marybel Villegas, who represents Tulum’s state of Quintana Roo in the nation’s congress. “Sometimes when a criminal act is committed we see property seizures, while in other cases where crimes are also committed, the place is only secured for one or two hours. We view with concern the accusations of corruption made by hotel businessmen,” Villegas said.

Among those accusations, Villegas added, is that dirty cops and prosecutors sometimes use their power to extort from business owners, refusing to re-open establishments until they’ve been paid off. The Quintana Roo office of the Fiscalía General del Estado (FGE) declined to be interviewed for this article.

Tulum has become the most celebrated of the resort towns along the beautiful Mayan Riviera. The former fishing village turned hippy pit-stop is now a high-end destination that welcomes the likes of Gwyneth Paltrow, Leonardo DiCaprio, Jared Leto, and Heidi Klum to recline on its idyllic sands. Danish Michelin-starred restaurant Noma recently opened a \$600-a-head pop-up restaurant here, and beachfront villas can run to thousands of dollars a night.

El Pez is owned and operated by a U.S.-based company called Colibri, which also maintains several other properties in Tulum. Like Rolando, Colibri owner John Kendall believes the raid was staged under false pretenses. He cites the rapid deployment of non-municipal officers—specifically those from FGE, which serves in a capacity akin to state police aiding attorneys general in the U.S. instead of local beat cops who would typically investigate an anonymous tip—as evidence of crooked policing.

“The FGE are based in Cancun,” which is about two hours from Tulum, said Kendall, a U.S. citizen who lives in Nicaragua but travels frequently to Mexico. “To arrive a few minutes after the fake report of gunshots at 2:30 a.m. simply indicates the FGE were already waiting to take illegal possession of El Pez.”

A public tourist official in Tulum, who agreed to speak with The Daily Beast only under the condition of anonymity, agreed with Kendall that the timing and presence of FGE officers was odd.

“It’s strange that just minutes after [the report of gunfire] the police arrive accompanied by the state prosecutors to search the hotel and find contraband in one of the rooms,” the official said. “It seems to me that the prudent thing would have been to seize the room and not the whole business.”

There have been other reports of the FGE seizing other properties in the area “under unusual circumstances and without any due legal process,” Kendall said, adding that this “appears to be a straight up land robbery staged by state officers... on behalf of a third party.”

For his part, the tourism official said there was a culture of “tremendous impunity” in Tulum. “It is regrettable that the prosecution allows itself to be used for issues of this type.”

Kendall, who is originally from New Zealand and has been investing in the Tulum area since 2003, claimed to know just who that third party is: Luis Alegre, a radio tycoon and aspiring gubernatorial candidate, who will in fact be running against Congresswoman Villegas in the upcoming governor’s race. Alegre [reportedly](#) owns property worth some \$18 million adjacent to the El Pez real estate.

According to Kendall, the October raid wasn’t the first time the Alegre family has allegedly used cops in an attempt to seize control of Colibri property. Luis’s father, Gastón Alegre, has been accused of employing the same tactic back in 2008, using local cops and hired security guards [to shut down El Pez](#) in an attempt to drive Kendall out of business.

“The Alegres have publicly stated they own land where El Pez is located, and they tried 10 years ago to take and keep possession,” Kendall said.

Kendall said the Alegres “covet” his hotel and grounds because it “is oceanfront and if combined with the other side it increases the value of [Alegre’s holdings]. This would be a strong motivation to try to [take] the El Pez land.”

Luis Alegre, however, told The Daily Beast that the property on which El Pez sits has been in his family for almost three decades. “Those lands belong to us, to my dad. With us there are no previous buyers or irregularities, the Legal Estate of the Government of the State of Quintana Roo sold it to us directly in 1994.”

At that time, Alegre said, the land was undeveloped. “There was nothing there then. It wasn’t until after 2006 that John Kendall arrived with a palapa and the invasion began growing.”

It’s easy to see why both men want to claim the same slice of paradise. There’s a reason why people come here from all over the world and pay more than a thousand dollars a night for a hotel room. Entering the cove on which El Pez sits is like stepping into another era. Not the hard and fast Tulum where ravers party until dawn—the only sounds are of waves and chirping birds as sea turtles crawl up the beach at night to lay their eggs in the sand.

Standing here, it’s easy to feel one with the ocean. Unless, of course, you’re a millionaire doing battle for ownership rights, in which case maybe all you see in the vast beachscape are dollar signs.

Alegre invited The Daily Beast to his office in Cancun on a Wednesday in mid-November, just after finishing his morning radio broadcast. The media mogul—who has been [accused](#) by his wife of endangering her and two of their young children during a domestic dispute involving the police back in March—is a big man of middle age. Polite, but imposing. His office was lined with framed pictures of his father, Gastón, standing next to former presidents of Mexico or famous people like Fidel Castro.

During the meeting, Alegre offered the property documents in question for inspection, but was emphatic in not allowing photographs or hard copies to be shared, claiming to fear that could jeopardize his ongoing legal dispute against the Colibri corporation.

Alegre claims that he owns the land on which El Pez sits, and he produced a land title registered for Lot 54, as well as maps that appear to show that plot number corresponding to El Pez's geographical location. The title Kendall shared with The Daily Beast was for Lot 29. Because the numbering system for coastal lots runs in ascending order from north to south, it is impossible for El Pez to be situated on Lot 29, according to Alegre. That location would put it in the protected zone of the Tulum National Park Reserve, where hotel construction is prohibited by law.

"What they are doing is using the same property title to occupy both lands," said Alegre, who told The Daily Beast that he was responsible for having seen to it that El Pez has remained closed since the raid last October. "The prosecutor's office cannot give the property back to people who do not own it, that's why it is still closed," said Alegre, though he denied being behind the raid itself.

As to the apparent discrepancy between the title for his deed plot designated Lot 29, in the Natural Park, and Alegre's Lot 54, which matches the geographical location for El Pez, Kendall said: "Rubbish. Our titles are registered in the public registry and on the cadastral maps."

The Alegres and Colibri have been deadlocked in a series of ongoing lawsuits over El Pez dating back to at least 2009. But in early January of this year, a federal judge in the Fifth District Court, Alonso Robles Cuétara, issued a stay of execution against the FGE's seizure of the hotel. In the court document, Robles Cuétara orders that El Pez shall be returned to Colibri on a provisional basis, while the litigation between the two sides is resolved.

"With this, the petitioner shall be able to enjoy, but not dispose of, the property, until such judgment rendered in the main proceeding [...] becomes final and conclusive," the judge wrote.

"During the handover, a detailed assessment of the El Pez hotel will be undertaken," Kendall said. "It is known that the hotel has been looted while in possession of the FGE and additional lawsuits are expected to be filed for damages, loss of income, and the theft that has been permitted by the FGE."

Alegre did not respond to The Daily Beast's invitation to comment on this turn of events by the time of publication. However, an [article](#) in *Turquesa*, a Mexican news outlet that is part of Alegre's media empire, ran a story charging Robles Cuétara with being part of a "network of corruption" and facilitating "land grabs left and right." The article cited some 30 instances of alleged malfeasance on the judge's part, stating that "[most] of these cases are registered in the municipality of Tulum."

The *Turquesa* article accuses the judge and an accomplice of having a "modus operandi" that involves "alter[ing] files of land litigation to favor a group of lawyers who act in a criminal manner." According to the article, a petition to have Robles Cuétara removed has been filed with Mexico's Supreme Court and the nation's president, among other high-ranking officials.

The court order had set the date for the handover of the property for Jan. 25—117 days after the hotel was closed. But that date came and went without the FGE allowing Colibri to take possession, apparently setting up a feud between state and federal authorities.

"[T]he prosecutor said that they could not give us possession because another prosecutor from another district in Cancun had now sealed the property," Kendall said. "Even though we are sure that the [power] of the Alegres and the state prosecutor reaches to the Governor of Quintana Roo, no one can outrank or overturn the resolutions and orders that come from a federal judge."

So it seems the battle for El Pez might be far from over.

"I don't know who has the genuine titles, or who is in the right in the dispute [between Kendall and Alegre]," said the Tulum-based tourist official. "But I do know that what the state prosecutor's office did to close down El Pez was wrong."

HEADLINE	02/05 Climate change alters smell of snow
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/2022/02/05/snow-smell-climate-change/
GIST	<p>How would you describe the scent of winter?</p> <p>Unlike spring, summer and fall, which have strongly defined aromas (flowers in bloom, beaches, decaying leaves), the current season is marked by the scent of nothing. Nothing's growing. Nothing's dying. It's a kind of olfactory pause.</p> <p>But snow has a scent, and researchers say that scent depends on what's in the ground and the air. And as both the atmosphere and the land are getting warmer, the scent of snow is getting stronger.</p> <p>Johan Lundstrom, a professor of clinical neuroscience who describes himself as a "smell researcher" at Monell Chemical Senses Center in Philadelphia, said because snow's smell reflects the impurities in the air, the flakes in Wisconsin smell different from snow in Sweden, and from snow in a city.</p> <p>Lundstrom said that people notice smells more in the summer because the humid and warmer air intensifies odor molecules, in the same way perfume smells more intense and different on the skin than when it is sprayed in the air. But the cold and dry air of winter makes for a "poor odor environment."</p> <p>"It's the same reason why the worst place to smell things is on a transcontinental airplane," he said. "You have dry air, you have different air pressure, and it's often colder than we would normally have in a room."</p> <p>The snow — particularly the top layer covering the ground — picks up compounds mostly from the air, Lundstrom said. As time passes, the snow absorbs more of those odor compounds, increasing the scent. And some molecules hit the nose harder than others.</p> <p>"For example, decaying biological material creates the chemical geosmin, a chemical we are so sensitive to [it's the odor of mold] so that if you take one drop and put that in an Olympic-size swimming pool and stir the water well, you can still smell the odor," he said. "In other words, it often does not take much pollution for us being able to smell it."</p> <p>Climate change is affecting the way snow smells, said Parisa A. Ariya, a chemist and chair of the Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences Department at McGill University. As the ground and air get warmer, that encourages the circulation — and intensity — of the odor molecules.</p> <p>Climate change is also affecting the amount of snow that the United States receives. Nationally, the contiguous United States has warmed 1.7 degrees since the 1901-1930 period, when climate normals were first calculated, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. That means it's getting wetter, but not snowier, with 80 percent of weather stations seeing a decrease in snow, according to an Environmental Protection Agency analysis.</p> <p>When snow falls, Ariya said, it's "a snapshot of the atmospheric process." In 2017, she helped conduct a study looking at how snow absorbs the pollution from gasoline engine exhaust, which could then contaminate the water and soil on the ground as it melts.</p> <p>What's on the ground gets pulled into the air, so a polluted area might see more trace metals in the snow, and an agricultural area might have more nitrogen [from fertilizer], Ariya said. Once the snow melts, some of that pollution is released into the soil, the water supply and back into the atmosphere. And the cycle begins again.</p> <p>"The increases in temperature have been suggested to increase the toxicity of certain contaminants and enhance the chemical reaction rates and degradation processes," Ariya said.</p>

The reason people often say they can “smell snow coming” is similar to differences in the air when a thunderstorm comes in during the summer, Lundstrom said. The air feels a little warmer, and gets more humid, which carries scent better, and there’s a change in the barometric pressure.

Lundstrom, who heads two research centers, one at Monell, another at the Department of Clinical Neuroscience at Karolinska Institutet in Sweden, said that snow in the city has an odor to it, whether it is exhaust from cars or the rubber from tires.

But when he goes to his cabin in Bjurstrask, which is about 60 miles from the Arctic Circle, it smells “extremely clean,” he said.

It’s not only snow that carries a scent, he said. Ice does as well. Think of old ice in the fridge — it smells odd and musty, as it has absorbed food odors. But ice can also carry fragrances that invoke happy memories.

When Lundstrom was 4 years old, growing up in Sweden, he would go ice fishing with his father and grandfather. He distinctly remembers the smell of the ice shavings as they drilled a hole for perch and pike.

“I would lie on a reindeer fur, and your face is right there next to the hole and you smell the shavings, and it smells like the lake,” he said, adding that it’s a sweet water lake, so ice smells fresh with a tinge of sea grass and sediment. “So every time I go back with my daughter and make a hole in the ice I’m right back, I’m 4-years-old lying on the reindeer fur trying to get fish. It’s a very positive emotion.”

Trying to explain what snow smells like is a challenge. When perfumer Christopher Brosius was creating the scent he called “Snow,” he was looking for a burst of something fresh and cold. Nothing really worked — until he talked to a friend about her first snow.

“She reminded me of a line from a French book, ‘Claudine at School,’ where she bites into a snowball and says ‘It always smells a little of dust, this first [snow]fall,’ ” Brosius, founder of the “[CB I Hate Perfume](#)” line, said. “So I had something that was earthy and wet and slightly green, but the thing missing was dust. That’s when I grabbed a bunch of bottles out of the archive and started creating.”

The result, which he created for his former perfume line Demeter, won awards for both male and female fragrance of the year in 2000. Brosius, who goes by “CB,” later created other snow iterations, including “Winter 1972,” and “Walking in the Air,” each of them slightly different based on the place and time of the snowfall.

In 2018, he created an art installation based on the smell of snow for the [Cooper Hewitt](#), the Smithsonian Design Museum based in New York. The project involved a room with a wool carpet below and pale blue balls of felted wool above, both of which were infused with a scent of snow. Compared with his other “snow” scents, he described this one as “fresher, wetter, more frozen and colder.”

“It was about that smell of snow when you put woolen mittens up to your face to keep your nose warm, with a bit of pine trees that were about 50 to 75 yards away at the edge of a field,” CB said. “Some people said that it even smelled cold.”

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HEADLINE	02/06 Morocco: trapped 5yr-old in deep well dies
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/world/rescuers-inch-closer-to-moroccan-boy-5-trapped-in-well/
GIST	<p>IGHRAN, Morocco (AP) — A 5-year-old boy who was trapped for four days in a deep well in Morocco has died, the royal palace said Saturday.</p> <p>Moroccan King Mohammed VI expressed his condolences to the boy’s parents in a statement released by the palace.</p>

The boy, Rayan, was pulled out Saturday night by rescuers after a lengthy operation that captivated global attention.

An Associated Press reporter at the scene saw the boy wrapped in a yellow blanket after he emerged from a tunnel dug specifically for the rescue.

His parents, Khaled Oram and Wassima Khersheesh had been escorted to an ambulance before the boy emerged. His plight had captured worldwide attention.

The palace statement said the king had been closely following the frantic rescue efforts by locals authorities, “instructing officials to use all means necessary to dig the boy out of the well and return him alive to his parents”. The king hailed the rescuers for their relentless work and the community for landing support to Rayan’s family.

Hundreds of villagers and others had gathered to watch the rescue operation.

Online messages of support and concern for the boy poured in from around the world as the rescue efforts dragged on for four days.

Rescuers used a rope to send oxygen and water down to the boy as well as a camera to monitor him. By Saturday morning, the head of the rescue committee, Abdelhadi Temrani, said: “It is not possible to determine the child’s condition at all at this time. But we hope to God that the child is alive.”

Rayan fell into a 32-meter (105-feet) well located outside his home in the village of Ighran in Morocco’s mountainous northern Chefchaouen province on Tuesday evening.

For three days, search crews used bulldozers to dig a parallel ditch. Then on Friday, they started excavating a horizontal tunnel to reach the trapped boy. Morocco’s MAP news agency said that experts in topographical engineering were called upon for help.

Temrani, speaking to local television 2M, said Saturday that rescuers had just two meters (yards) left to dig to reach the hole where the boy had been trapped.

“The diggers encountered a hard rock on their way, and were therefore very careful to avoid any landslides or cracks,” he said. “It took about five hours to get rid of the rock because the digging was slow and was done in a careful way to avoid creating cracks in the hole from below, which could threaten the life of the child as well as the rescue workers.”

The work has been especially difficult because of fears that the soil surrounding the well could collapse on the boy.

The village of about 500 people is dotted with deep wells, many used for irrigating the cannabis crop that is the main source of income for many in the poor, remote and arid region of Morocco’s Rif Mountains. Most of the wells have protective covers.

The exact circumstances of how the boy fell in the well are unclear.

Nationwide, Moroccans had taken to social media to offer their hopes for the boy’s survival, using the hashtag #SaveRayan which has brought global attention to the rescue efforts.

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HEADLINE	02/04 Parts Palouse Falls park close permanently
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/life/outdoors/parts-of-palouse-falls-state-park-closing-permanently-4-visitors-have-died-there/

GIST

The public will be prohibited from hiking into potentially dangerous areas at Palouse Falls State Park in Eastern Washington after four people died at the park in recent years.

The Washington state Parks and Recreation Commission voted Jan. 27 to permanently close the pool at the bottom of the falls, the cliff sides with narrow trails above the pool and the top of the falls.

The closure also includes the Castle Rock formation, or Coyote's Puppies as it is known by Native Americans, which juts from the ground not far from the top of the falls and sometimes attracts rock climbers.

Staff at the state park, which includes land in Franklin and Whitman counties, have tried multiple ways short of closures in recent years to curb dangerous behavior, trespassing and vandalism.

The remote, 105-acre park is particularly popular during the spring snow melt when the Palouse River is at its highest and the most water plunges off a basalt rock shelf to a churning bowl nearly 200 feet below.

The park has three viewpoints to see the falls in areas that remain open to the public.

But some visitors don't stick to developed areas, despite strong warnings about dangers.

Four men, all in their 20s, died at the park in separate springtime incidents between 2016 and 2018 after following unofficial trails into undeveloped areas.

A man from Colville, in Stevens County, and a man from Lake Stevens, drowned when they went swimming in the pool at the bottom of the falls.

And a man from Spokane and a man from Colfax, Whitman County, fell to their deaths from an unofficial trail worn into the ground that takes hikers to the cliffs over Palouse River above the falls.

Visitors are warned on social media and on the park website before they visit that areas of the park are potentially hazardous and that they will be responsible for any rescue costs if they are injured.

In emergencies, Pasco Fire Department crews may be called out, making the 1 hour and 45 minute drive each way, and sometimes spending all day at the park on technical rescues, along with Franklin County Fire District 3.

Fences have gone up to discourage visitors from taking unofficial trails outside the small developed area of the park, but undeveloped areas had not previously been officially closed.

The new signs posted after the most recent deaths are blunt.

"Warning — People have died here," one says. "We want you to live — Stay back from cliff edge."

Safety is the main reason for permanently closing parts of the park, said Laura Moxham, park planner, at the commission meeting.

It also should help prevent vandalism, such as graffiti painted on the rock cliffs, and other damage at the park.

The closure also would make cases against those who trespass or destroy natural or cultural resources easier to prosecute, the commission was told.

New temporary closures also are being put in place at the park, covering the north and south ends that some visitors use to reach the water.

Plans are being made to develop safe trails in those areas.

	<p>Those wanting to visit those areas during the temporary closure will need to apply for a special activity or research permit.</p> <p>The commission also gave the place a new name — the Palouse Falls State Park Heritage Site.</p> <p>The new name “provides a clear understanding for visitors before stepping foot in the park that this is a special place,” Moxham said.</p> <p>The geology at the falls was carved by ice age floods more than 13,000 years ago, giving the waterfall national significance, she said. It is among the last active waterfalls on the Ice Age floods path.</p> <p>People come from throughout the Pacific Northwest to see the falls, according to park officials.</p> <p>Because crowds at the park have increased over the last eight years, the commission voted to end tent camping, the only kind allowed there, and refocus the park on scenic overlooks.</p> <p>Palouse Falls was named the state waterfall in 2014, a step that has been credited with contributing to the jump from 46,000 park visitors about a decade ago to 200,000 visitors annually just before the pandemic.</p> <p>But state park officials said the increase in visitors coincides with the increasing popularity of social media.</p> <p>People share their adventures and photos of the falls, and more people plan visits.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/04 FAA: aviation laser strikes at record high
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/business-strikes-federal-aviation-administration-2887b368a398c4b2c3089e7d77ac37dc
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — Pilots reported a record 9,723 incidents of lasers aimed at their aircraft last year, a 41% jump over the year before.</p> <p>The Federal Aviation Administration released the figures Friday, just a week after four airline flights were hit by a laser near Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. All four planes landed safely.</p> <p>The FAA said it handed out \$120,000 in fines for laser strikes in 2021. Fines can range up to \$11,000 for one incident and up to \$30,800 for multiple violations, and violators can face federal criminal charges.</p> <p>Lasers aimed at planes and helicopters have been a safety concern for more than a decade despite jail sentences for people who get caught. Authorities have tried rewards for turning in perpetrators and legislation making it easier to prosecute them.</p> <p>The FAA said pilots have reported 244 injuries from laser strikes since the agency began keeping figures in 2010.</p> <p>The number of laser incidents topped 1,000 in 2009 and has been rising most years ever since. Authorities say the problem is made worse by the availability of cheap laser pointers and devices getting more powerful.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/05 Beijing wanted Winter Olympics; need snow
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/05/sports/olympics/snow-winter-olympics.html
GIST	<p>BEIJING — China did not move mountains to host the 2022 Winter Olympics. But it flooded a dried riverbed, diverted water from a key reservoir that supplies Beijing and resettled hundreds of farmers and their families, all to feed one of the most extensive snow-making operations in the history of the Games.</p>

This is what happens when the International Olympic Committee decides to bring the Winter Games to a place almost completely lacking in one of the main ingredients for winter sports: snow. What's more, Beijing and its nearby mountains did not have that much water to make the artificial kind, either.

Machine-made snow has played a major role in winter sports for decades, even in snowier places like Norway, Switzerland and Colorado. In Beijing's version of the Winter Games, the competitions that begin this weekend will for the first time take place almost entirely on artificial snow, necessitating an Olympic snow-making and water-management operation of enormous scale, and foreshadowing the reality of snow sports everywhere as the planet warms.

On the mountains where the Alpine competitions take place, which do not have any recreational skiing, narrow strips of white, visible from miles away, now cut through the brown mountains.

Beijing officials insist that snow production for the Games will not strain local water supplies, which have struggled to keep pace with the city's demands. But China's herculean investments in snow making are part of larger efforts to turn the arid mountains near Beijing into a permanent ski and snowboard hub, a project that could face challenges as climate change upends patterns of rainfall and drought.

Worldwide, the environmentally unfriendly secret of skiing and snowboarding competitions is that, as natural snow becomes less reliable, they almost always take place on the artificial kind. As the planet continues to heat up, machine-made snow will play an ever-larger role in guaranteeing a consistent, high-caliber field of play.

"You could not have winter sports now without man-made snow," said Michael Mayr, the Asia manager of TechnoAlpin, the Italian company in charge of snow-making for the Beijing Games and at six previous Winter Olympics.

What sets Beijing apart from many of those past venues are its tight supplies of water, whether for snow making or for anything else. Over the past few decades, rapid development has sapped Beijing's groundwater. July and August often bring heavy rains, but the city and nearby mountains get only sprinkles of precipitation in the winter: less than 2.5 inches per season on average in recent decades, according to data from a weather station near the Olympic venues.

In 2017, the last year for which [international figures](#) are available, Beijing had only about as much freshwater resources per resident — 36,000 gallons — as the western African nation of Niger, at the edge of the Sahara. Zhangjiakou, the city 100 miles northwest of the capital that will host some skiing and snowboarding events, had 83,000 gallons per resident, comparable to Djibouti in the Horn of Africa.

The United States, by contrast, had 2.3 million gallons per person. Countries with less than 260,000 gallons of freshwater resources per person are considered water-scarce.

Florian Hajzeri, who has been in China for four years overseeing the snow-making project for TechnoAlpin, said he realized the magnitude of his task as soon as he saw the landscape of the Olympic competition areas.

"There are trees and vegetation, but it is not like an Alpine forest: It is vegetation for a drier climate," he said. "It snows, but it is not enough for the competitions."

Before TechnoAlpin could install pumps and build more than 40 miles of pipe, at a cost of nearly \$60 million, Chinese officials first had to figure out how to deliver enough water to the mountains.

How much water? Roughly one million cubic meters, according to TechnoAlpin, enough to fill 400 Olympic-size swimming pools. And that is just to start the Games. More snow, and more water, will likely be needed as the competitions take place.

To gather it all, Chinese authorities have built pumping stations to carry water from reservoirs miles away. According to a [state-run newspaper](#), Beijing has diverted water from the city's Baihebao Reservoir to the Guishui River, which flows near the Olympic zone but had long been [mostly dried up in winter](#).

Previously, [Baihebao had primarily supplied](#) the Miyun Reservoir, one of the largest stores of clean water for Beijing households.

Officials in Zhangjiakou — which is pronounced sort of like “jong jah coe” — have turned off irrigation across [tens of thousands of acres](#) to conserve groundwater, and resettled farmers who were living in what is now the Olympic competition area in high-rise apartments.

Modern China is no stranger to monumental water projects. Its biggest effort to ease Beijing's water troubles began well before the Olympics: a colossal series of waterways that is transferring trillions of gallons of water a year from the nation's humid south to its thirsty north. [Hundreds of thousands of villagers](#) were relocated to make way for the canals. Water from the project accounted for a sixth of Beijing's water supply in 2020.

While the Chinese government has made progress on water issues in recent years, scientists and environmentalists say the capital cannot afford to rest on its laurels.

“They still have to do more on water conservation, increasing water-use efficiency and ensuring social equity in water allocation,” said Ximing Cai, a professor of water resources engineering at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. If the Olympics spur a burst of economic development in the hills near Beijing, he said, “the water use associated with that should be planned with caution.”

But climate change could both deepen northern China's need for water and affect southern China's ability to provide it. Scientists have found that recent severe heat waves and floods in China were much more likely to occur because of human-caused climate change.

“Under the backdrop of global warming, the risks to major infrastructure projects in China are increasing,” Zheng Guoguang, then the country's top weather official, [told a Communist Party journal in 2015](#), citing the South-North transfer project among others.

[Chinese officials](#) say they are limiting the impact of snow-making, particularly because the snow that is made will be collected after it melts so it can be reused.

But scientists who study snow-making have found that a portion of the water evaporates after it is blasted out of a cannon but before it can crystallize into a flake. Some of the flakes are blown away by wind. Some droplets do not fully freeze and end up draining into the ground.

Two researchers in Switzerland, Thomas Grünwald and Fabian Wolfsperger, conducted experiments at a ski resort near Davos and found that as much as 35 percent of the water used for snow making was lost in these ways. (Water that seeps into the ground is not gone completely, of course. It helps replenish groundwater.)

Still, Wolfsperger said, “It's definitely not environmentally friendly” to build a ski hub near a water-scarce place like Beijing. “But winter sports have never been that in general.”

Other research has found that artificial ski runs can erode the soil and degrade vegetation, regardless of the kind of snow they use.

For skiers and snowboarders, competing entirely on machine-made snow changes everything about how they prepare for the Olympics, the biggest event of most of their lives, from the wax they use to increase speed, to training for the heightened risk of a slicker surface. In warmer weather, man-made snow surfaces tend to break down more quickly than those made of natural snow, athletes said.

	<p>“This is not the first time we have been racing on artificial snow, and unfortunately it does not seem like it’s going to be the last,” said Jessie Diggins, a gold medalist in cross-country in 2018 who has become a climate change activist in recent years.</p> <p>“It’s harder and icier and transforms differently with different weather,” she said. “And because it is faster, some of the downhill ski much faster when you are rolling in. It can make the course — I don’t want to say dangerous — but more tricky in terms of figuring out how you are going to navigate corners.”</p> <p>Under certain conditions, though, such as the very cold temperatures expected in China, Alpine skiers sometimes prefer artificial snow, because technicians can produce wet flakes that freeze into the kind of smooth, rock-hard surface they prefer.</p> <p>“It is more dense,” said Travis Ganong, an American who specializes in speed events. “It doesn’t really form flakes, and when it is groomed it gets more packed. It just sits really well, and it becomes very uniform. It’s actually how we like it.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/04 ‘Trust us’ often reason not to trust govt.
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/04/us/politics/government-national-security-announcements.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The dramatic national security stories recounted in two official news briefings on Thursday centered on very different subjects, but they featured the same indignant pushback to questioning reporters: just trust us, unless you are more inclined to believe America’s enemies.</p> <p>Pressed for evidence supporting an official narrative about how children had died during a commando raid in Syria — specifically, that an ISIS leader’s bomb, not American forces, had killed them — the White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, seemed to bristle at a suggestion that people might be dubious about the civilian casualties.</p> <p>“Skeptical of the U.S. military’s assessment when they went and took out an ISIS terror — the leader of ISIS?” Ms. Psaki said. “That they are not providing accurate information and ISIS is providing accurate information?”</p> <p>And pushed for evidence supporting his announcement that intelligence showed that Russia had plans to manufacture a pretext to invade Ukraine — a fake video, with hauled-in corpses and “crisis actors,” to frame the Ukrainian military for a genocidal attack on Russian speakers — the State Department spokesman, Ned Price, sharply rejected the idea.</p> <p>“We declassify information only when we’re confident in that information,” Mr. Price said. “If you doubt the credibility of the U.S. government, of the British government, of other governments, and want to, you know, find solace in information that the Russians are putting out — that is, that is for you to do.”</p> <p>In the most sensitive and consequential government operations, the public is beholden to the narrative of officials — which sometimes turns out to be wrong. Yet officials can be defensive about skepticism from the news media, as unfolded twice on Thursday.</p> <p>That poses a particular dilemma for journalists who cover national security and who are once again in the uncomfortable position of having to rely on top government officials for the first cut of what happened. What the officials say is news to be reported, but it is often impossible to independently verify the details right away.</p> <p>And history shows that the early official narrative about big national security events is often wrong. Sometimes, the fog of war leads to murkiness that has confused even the government officials, but officials may also be in situations where they have an incentive to put a spin on the facts.</p> <p>In August, the United States carried out a drone strike in Kabul amid the evacuation from Afghanistan, and the military announced that it had thwarted would-be ISIS-K suicide bombers. Even as reports emerged of</p>

civilian casualties, including children, Gen. Mark A. Milley, the Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman, insisted the strike was “righteous.” Only later, after a [video investigation](#) by The New York Times showed that the person targeted was an innocent aid worker, did the Pentagon acknowledge that the strike [had been a tragic mistake](#) and that no ISIS-K fighters had been killed.

In 2011, when the Obama administration announced the commando raid in Pakistan that killed Osama bin Laden, the president’s chief counterterrorism adviser, John O. Brennan, said the Qaeda leader had engaged in a firefight and used his wife as a human shield. Days later, the White House [walked back its account](#), saying that bin Laden had been neither armed nor cowering behind a woman.

During the buildup to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, officials in President George W. Bush’s administration famously put forth intelligence about purported Iraqi weapons of mass destruction that turned out to be inaccurate. They also stoked baseless fears that Iraq’s secular dictator, Saddam Hussein, was collaborating with the religious extremists behind the Sept. 11 attacks, Al Qaeda.

During the wars [in Vietnam](#) and, more recently, [in Afghanistan](#), administration officials under both parties often issued a more optimistic picture of progress to the public than the government’s internal assessments supported. And President Lyndon B. Johnson justified an escalation of the war in Vietnam based on a supposed North Vietnamese attack on an American vessel in the Gulf of Tonkin that [never happened](#).

Recognizing that the American government has not always shared credible information and that its statements in such situations should be approached with skepticism is different from equating the United States to ISIS or to Russia, which is notorious for disinformation operations — including [a propaganda campaign](#) suggesting that Ukraine is guilty of genocide against its Russian-speaking citizens.

And there are differences that may lend a greater presumption of credibility to the U.S. government’s current claims. The situation on the border between Ukraine and Russia is not like Vietnam or Iraq, for example, in that the United States is trying to deter a conflict, rather than justify or start one.

Moreover, in the raid in Syria, [accounts on the ground](#) largely dovetail with the official narrative that U.S. commandos were on bullhorns trying to get civilians safely out of the building under assault. Photographs also confirm there was an explosion on its third floor.

Still, against the backdrop of historical inaccuracies in the American government’s official presentation of the facts after high-profile counterterrorism operations in which civilians were killed, or during the period of information warfare that can precede a shooting war, many reporters tend to be loath to simply accept the government’s word.

At a White House briefing on Friday, a reporter raised Ms. Psaki’s and Mr. Price’s comments and asked Ms. Psaki whether she truly believed that journalists were repeating Russian and Islamic State propaganda in seeking evidence for claims by the American government.

Ms. Psaki replied that she and the administration welcomed “tough questions and good-faith scrutiny” and that they “respect and value the role of the press.” She added that on Thursday, she had gone on to note — in comments omitted from some clips of the exchange that circulated afterward — that the Pentagon was still analyzing a strike that had unfolded less than 24 hours earlier and would “provide every detail they can.”

The Pentagon spokesman, John F. Kirby, [told NPR on Friday](#) that he was unable to predict whether video of the operation would be disclosed. But he reiterated that the explosion was caused by the detonation of a bomb by the ISIS leader — citing initial debriefings of the commandos who participated in the operation.

“They’ve laid bare what they saw and what they did,” he said. “We’re very confident that the explosion on the third floor happened well before the assaulting force even got into the building. Certainly, there was no airstrike conducted.” He added that the explosion “was definitely the result of” the ISIS leader’s action.

For his part, Mr. Price noted in an interview that when he displayed exasperation with the reporter pressing him for evidence underlying his announcement that Russia had plans to fake a video of a Ukrainian atrocity, he was addressing a room full of experienced reporters who he knew already understood that the government tries to protect sensitive intelligence sources and methods — and why.

He would not provide details about how particular sources could be damaged, but national security officials have provided examples in other contexts. For instance, making public specific intercepted phone calls or emails serves notice to adversaries about which particular communications channels are likely compromised — so they stop using those channels, which dry up as sources of further useful information.

“What we are trying to do is strike a balance between transparency about what we know with an eye to deterring Russian aggression — or in the event we are not able to do that, to shining a spotlight on the fact that the Russians sought to have a pretext all along for their aggression — while at the same time protecting our ability to collect this kind of information going forward,” Mr. Price said.

He added: “It is not an easy balance to strike. It is, I’m sure, an unsatisfactory balance for journalists and some members of the public. But as the custodians of American national security, it’s the balance that we have to do.”

In a separate interview, Ms. Psaki struck a more conciliatory tone, stressing that from a spokesperson’s perspective, it would be easier to be able to release every detail. She also said that after the briefing on Thursday, she contacted the reporter who had questioned her; she said she told the reporter that it was not her intention to undervalue the question and that “if you felt that way, I apologize.”

Indeed, the Biden administration has walked back an important nuance in its presentation of the official understanding of the facts of the crisis between Russia and Ukraine. In recent weeks, [Ms. Psaki](#) and [Mr. Kirby](#) used the word “imminent” or “imminently” in official briefings about the prospect of a Russian invasion of Ukraine.

But [Ukrainian officials complained](#) that American messaging was too heated and alarmist, and this week, Ms. Psaki said the administration [had stopped using that word](#).

“I used that once,” she said. “I think others have used that once. And then we stopped using it because I think it sent a message that we weren’t intending to send, which was that we knew that President Putin had made a decision. I would say the vast majority of times I’ve talked about it, we said, ‘He could invade at any time.’ That’s true; we still don’t know that he’s made a decision.”

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HEADLINE	02/04 Hatchery missing 250,000 steelhead fish
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/250k-steelhead-fish-missing-from-wa-state-hatchery/
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. (AP) — Nearly 250,000 young steelhead fish that were set for release into the Snake River later this year are missing from a rearing pond at a hatchery on the river near Palouse Falls, according to state wildlife managers.</p> <p>The smolts that were discovered missing on Sunday accounted for about 64% of Lyons Ferry Hatchery’s Wallowa stock summer steelhead and less than 8% of the overall hatchery steelhead production in the Snake River basin, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife said Thursday in a statement.</p> <p>A rubber gasket failed, leaving an inch-and-half gap which created a path for the fish to head to the Snake River, Chris Donley, Fish and Wildlife’s eastern region fishery manager, told the Spokesman-Review. Staff discovered the failure when they began to lower the water level.</p> <p>“I don’t believe this was a staff failure,” Donley told reporters. “This was an equipment failure.”</p>

Agency officials in Olympia will decide whether to investigate further, Donley said. No immediate information was provided on the financial impact of the hatchery equipment problem and the loss of the smolts.

Whether or not the 249,770 smolts survived isn't clear and mostly depends on when they escaped, Donley said.

It's possible that if they escaped the holding pen when water was being lowered Sunday and may survive, leading to a higher-than-normal number of returning steelhead near Lyons Ferry.

Normally, the fish and wildlife department releases 60,000 steelhead smolts at Lyons Ferry. However, if they escaped earlier in the winter or during the late fall, many were likely eaten by walleye or other predators.

A smolt is a juvenile salmon or steelhead fish, between 12 and 15 months old. Steelhead and salmon smolts are reared and released in various areas of the state. The agency operates 80 hatcheries across Washington and raises about 5 million steelhead smolts annually.

On Monday and Tuesday, hatchery staff transported the remaining 135,230 smolts from Lyons Ferry to the Cottonwood Acclimation Pond, on the Grande Ronde River near the Oregon border.

These fish will be released into the Grande Ronde River in April. Most will spend one year in the ocean and return to the Columbia basin as adult steelhead in 2023.

Last year was a bad year for steelhead returns on the Snake River. The dismal returns, of both wild and hatchery-reared fish, are attributed to bad ocean conditions, dams and warm summertime water temperatures, although ocean conditions seem to be improving, giving managers some hope for a rebound.

Advocates for dam removal and habitat restoration on the Snake River pointed to the hatchery failure as an example of why wild fish — and the habitat they depend upon — are preferable to fish raised in hatcheries.

"We want to see natural systems work because they're more resilient," said Gregory Fitz, the communications manager for the Wild Steelhead Coalition group that works toward increasing the return of wild steelhead. "Natural systems function better in the long run. You're not waiting for parts to fail."

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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	02/07 First-ever prosecution 1988 Iran massacre
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/02/07/sweden-iran-trial-1988-massacre-hamid-noury-MEK/4511638287097/
GIST	<p>Feb. 7 (UPI) -- A relatively unknown former Iranian prosecutor is being tried in Stockholm, Sweden, in a landmark case over the deaths of thousands of political prisoners 34 years ago. But survivors of the massacre say it is the entire regime that's on trial.</p> <p>Hamid Noury was arrested Nov. 11, 2019, upon touching down at Stockholm Arlanda Airport on probable cause of committing crimes in Iran against international law, gross crime and murder.</p> <p>In the indictment preceding the trial that began in August, Swedish prosecutors accused the 60-year-old man of acting as deputy prosecutor at Gohardasht Prison in the city of Karaj, north of Tehran, where he aided in "mass executions" of political prisoners from July 30 to Sept. 6, 1988.</p> <p>The trial is expected to run until April.</p>

Noury, who rejects the charges, is also accused of torturing prisoners and subjecting them to inhumane conditions of "severe death anxiety," according to the indictment.

Survivors of the massacre say Noury was working under those who would make their way through the regime's ranks and now lead the country -- including President Ebrahim Raisi.

"If you look, you will see that all those people who took part in that crime, and they were active at that time, they now hold key posts in the Iranian government," Mahmoud Royaie, a former political prisoner who survived the massacre, told UPI.

During the summer of 1988, the regime culled political prisoners in at least 32 cities nationwide, with the bodies discarded in unmarked mass graves, according to a 2020 letter sent by United Nations human rights experts to the Iranian government.

The executions were conducted under a fatwa, or religious edict, issued by the nation's then-spiritual leader, Ayatollah Sayyid Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini, in July 1988, ordering the extermination of the controversial People's Mujahedin Organization of Iran, known by the initials MEK. The order was expanded later that summer to include other political dissident prisoners.

Iranian activists have identified nearly 5,000 political prisoners who were executed that summer by the state, but the MEK estimates that the real death toll could be as high as 30,000.

Noury is the first person to be tried in connection with the massacre.

Witness accounts

Royaie, 58, a member of the MEK, told UPI via a translator from the group's headquarters in Albania that he was witness to Noury's crimes.

"He had a role in the murder of hundreds of my closest friends," he said.

Noury's charging document states Royaie -- who was arrested Aug. 30, 1981 and sentenced to 10 years for being a sympathizer of the MEK -- can testify that Noury, who went by the name Hamid Abbasi at the prison, called the names of several MEK prisoners to be executed on Aug. 3, 1988.

Witnesses have said Noury took prisoners from their cells to a hall they called the death corridor, read out the names of those to be brought before the death commission to which he provided written and oral information about the prisoners to decide their fate. He would then escort the doomed prisoners to the hall where they would be executed.

Both MEK survivors of Gohardasht Prison who spoke with UPI said those accused of being members or sympathizers of the MEK were ordered by the commission to publicly renounce their support for the organization. Some of those who did were permitted to finish their sentences and were eventually released. Those who did not were killed.

"They ... described themselves as the amnesty commission, the commission that is to pardon prisoners. We labeled that place the death commission," Royaie said. "And these names have remained since then, because that was not a court, it had no resemblance of a court ... They gathered in that room on the order of Khomeini in order to identify and hunt down people who remain committed to the principles of the People's Mujahedin."

The two men said they survived the massacre because they were not as "brave" as those who did not.

"I wasn't as brave as they were because I finally write that I condemn the Monafeqin," Reza Fallahi, an MEK member now based in Britain, told UPI, referring to his organization by a pejorative term meaning

"hypocrites," used to slander the organization by the Iranian regime. "They never wrote this, so they were executed because they were brave, and I was a coward. Honestly, ... many people say so 'you were lucky,' but I know, no, I was not."

UPI contacted the Iranian Embassy in Stockholm and the foreign ministry in Tehran for comment on this story. They have not responded.

Seeking regime change

Since its founding by leftist students in 1965, the MEK has sought regime change -- first that of the Western-backed monarchy of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and then that of Khomeini.

Through the 1970s, the organization was involved in terrorists attacks in Iran that the State Department said resulted in the deaths of U.S. citizens, and which the United States would cite as cause to designate the group as a foreign terrorist organization from 1997 to 2012. The organization denies responsibility for the U.S. deaths and says the designation was political.

The MEK also fought alongside the powers that brought Khomeini to the country's helm in 1979, but the pseudo alliance fast dissolved afterward, and the MEK was forced into exile after attempting an armed uprising against the regime, according to the Congressional Research Service.

In 1981, the heads of the organization, having fled to Paris, founded the National Council of Resistance of Iran, the MEK's political arm, to act as an Iranian government in exile.

Then in 1986, according to the Council of Foreign Relations, Paris expelled the MEK leaders in a deal with Tehran for the release of French hostages. The group moved its base to eastern Iraq from where it supported its then leader, Saddam Hussein, in the war of 1981-88 against Iran.

The grounds for Swedish prosecutors to seek war crimes charges against Noury stem from the MEK's involvement in the war. Its armed wing, called the National Liberation Army, attacked Iran from Iraq, including in the days before Khomeini issued the fatwa, ordering "those who are in prison throughout the country and remain steadfast in their support for the Monafeqin are waging war on God and are condemned to execution."

Prominent Iranian women's rights activist Mansoureh Behkish is a member of the informal Mothers and Families of Khavaran group that seeks truth and justice for state atrocities committed starting in the 1980s. Of her six family members who were killed by the regime, two of them were executed at Gohardasht Prison during the massacre for being leftists.

Since seizing power in the late 1970s, the regime targeted its political opposition, she said, but the massacre differs in that those executed were not sentenced to death.

She explained that after the Iran-Iraq war ended on Aug. 20, 1988, with a cease-fire brokered by the United Nations, Khomeini used the MEK's unsuccessful incursion into Iran to target not only the strong political MEK but all political prisoners who could present opposition.

The regime wanted to reconstruct the country, she said, "and they knew these activists wouldn't agree."

"They wanted the country don't have any people protest to them," she said.

A second motivation by the regime for the massacre was to send a message to the broader society: Keep quiet and do as we say, she said.

War crimes

Sweden-based American lawyer Kenneth Lewis told UPI in a recent interview that there is some debate among legal circles whether Noury can be charged with war crimes under what he called a "primitive" Swedish law that was in place during the massacre. Some could interpret the MEK attacking Iran from Iraq not as an international armed conflict, but as a domestic one.

In an effort to prevent Noury from getting off on a technicality, the Swedish prosecution has also charged him with murder for intentionally killing "a large number" of Gohardasht prisoners seen as apostates by the regime for either being members of or sympathizing with various left-wing groups. The indictment states these killings occurred between Aug. 27 and Sept. 6, 1988.

"Swedish domestic legislation does not include crimes against humanity committed before 1 July 2014 and could not be relied on in this indictment as the alleged criminal acts took place before that date," Swedish prosecutor Kristina Lindhoff Carleson said in a statement when the charges were announced in late July. "Therefore, the indictment involves crimes against the international law, i.e. war crimes, as well as murder."

In response to the charges, the defense in the case argues that Noury wasn't present at the prison during the massacre, said Lewis, who has worked with the MEK since the late 1990s and is attending the trial, representing four MEK members.

Defense attorneys couldn't be reached for comment.

Lewis said the defense argues that Noury was on an extended vacation ahead of the birth of one of his children when he is accused of participating in the massacre, that he was not the deputy prosecutor at Gohardasht and that the prisoners are confusing him for someone else.

"They're claiming really that to the extent that all these people are pointing him out and saying he was there -- they're lying. And not only that, they've been influenced by each other," he said. "That's their line of defense."

If convicted, Noury could face four years to life in a Swedish prison, but activists and survivors of the massacre say the fact the trial is being held at all is a victory for their cause.

"I would say even if there isn't a conviction, the fact that all of this evidence is being compiled in a court of law in a Western country, it can all be used in a new case against people who are on a higher level," Lewis said.

Regime's highest ranks

Among the evidence is witness testimony that points to the highest ranks of the Iranian regime being present and active in the massacre.

Royaie said that on Aug. 3, 1988, the day he can attest to Noury having called out the names of those to be executed, he was summoned before the quasi-judicial panel at Gohardasht.

"When I sat before the death commission, they took off my blindfold, and I saw five people sitting in front of me," he said.

Those five men were Noury, and the commission's four members: Hossein Ali Nayyeri, Morteza Eshraghi, Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi and Raisi.

Since the massacre, all have gone on to hold high-ranking positions in the Iranian government, according to the United States Institute of Peace.

Nayyeri served as deputy chief justice of Iran's Supreme Court until 2013 and then became the head of the Disciplinary Court of Judges, a position he holds today.

Eshraghi was a judge on the Supreme Court and is now a member of the Iranian Bar Association.

And Mostafa Pourmohammadi was the minister of the interior from 2005 to 2008 and the minister of justice from 2013 to 2017. His current position is adviser to the head of the judiciary.

None yet, however, have secured a position higher than that of Raisi, who became president in an August election the United States has said was neither free nor fair.

"The DNA of this regime is intertwined with the massacre of 1988," Shashin Gobadi, the Paris-based spokesman for the MEK, told UPI.

Royaie, who has written books about the massacre, said government posts in Iran are filled by the regime based on loyalty, and if one scrutinizes its ranks, one would find the same revolutionary guards and wardens who oversaw prisons during 1988.

"Today's government is members of the 1988 death commission," he said

He said he saw future ministers observe him being tortured, and that participating in the massacre was how one proves their worth to rise through the regime's ranks.

Ali Khamenei -- the current spiritual leader who succeeded Khomeini upon his death in 1989 and who was president of Iran during the massacre -- brought Raisi to power to instill fear into the public amid the recent and persistent uprisings and protests, Royaie said.

"We are facing a regime which we could describe as a regime of massacre," he said. "And its president, Ebrahim Raisi, is the outcome."

Behkish said his presidency is meant to be an obvious threat to those who may wish to challenge regime rule and demand freedom and justice in Iran.

"They want to show that they can very [easily] kill us," she said.

More trials?

Members of the MEK have told UPI that this trial may lead to further trials, as the court document states: "Noury is to be regarded as an accomplice as he ... promoted the intentional killing, as well as the torture and the inhuman treatment with counsel and deed."

Iran has never acknowledged the massacre, while making it taboo to discuss it at home. It has refused to provide families with accurate or complete information about the deaths of their loved ones, and has continued to deny the killings while having "trivialized" the number of deaths, claiming many were killed in conflict, the U.N. letter states.

Through the persistence of activists and publicity for the trial, news of it is spreading, Gobadi said, as has the movement for justice, which has been active since weeks after the massacre began.

But Gobadi argues that the massacres continue as those who perpetrated it still run the country.

"This is an ongoing crime against humanity because the very same people, the very same characters who committed this crime against humanity, have been killing and executing Iranian peoples unabatedly," he said.

He pointed to the more than 1,000 people killed by the regime in an attempt to quell mass protests that erupted in November 2019 against a fuel price hike.

Gobadi said the regime has been immune to scrutiny for its crimes, but that impunity may be cracking.

In May, 152 former U.N. officials and international human rights and legal experts wrote to Michelle Bachelet, the U.N. high commissioner for human rights, calling for a commission into the massacre.

Following Raisi's election in June, Amnesty International demanded he be investigated for crimes against humanity for involvement with the death commissions.

Activists have cited international protests, Noury's ongoing trial and their pressure on governments as reasons for Raisi not attending the U.N. General Assembly in September, for which he gave his speech remotely, and the U.N. climate change summit in Glasgow, Scotland, last fall.

"It was obvious that Raisi is very much fearful of attending an international arena, and it is obvious that he knows full well the world has come to know his real nature and his real function as a mass murderer," Gobadi said.

Behkish said ultimately Noury's trial, while a success, is only to confirm whether he participated in the massacre and that too much attention is being given to Raisi's involvement, as the entire regime should be tried and punished -- ideally by an Iranian court.

"All of this government is guilty. Not only Raisi. Raisi is only one person. Hamid Noury is one person. Khomeini is one person," she said. "We wish [in] the future, all of this bring to the trial, the same trial."

She explained that she hopes in the future the trial of the massacre would be the end of "the dictatorship, injustice and discrimination" in Iran.

"But at the moment we can't do this," she told UPI from Ireland, where she has lived since September 2017 and where she was when an Iranian court convicted her in absentia to 7 ½ years in prison for her activism.

Royaie, however, is confident time is running out for the regime. He said there is a new generation of Iranians demanding justice who won't back down.

"People want to know what happened to those 30,000," he said. "This is a flame which is strengthening by the day. I have no doubt it will burn the regime to the ground."

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HEADLINE	02/06 Report: illicit art market money laundering
SOURCE	https://www.artlyst.com/news/us-treasury-releases-report-on-illicit-art-market-money-laundering/
GIST	<p>The U.S. Department of the Treasury has published their study on the facilitation of money laundering and the financing of terrorism through the trade in works of high-value art. Heavyweight art dealers and auction houses spent over \$1 million lobbying federal officials in Washington on this and other regulatory issues over the past two years. The long awaited report seems to wash over many of the problems existing in the upper end of the art market and makes only a passing reference to the sale of NFTs and the use of hard to trace cryptocurrencies.</p> <p>“We have found that while certain aspects of the high-value art market are vulnerable to money laundering, it’s often the case that there are larger underlying issues at play, like the abuse of shell companies or the participation of complicit professionals, so we are tackling those first,” said the Senior Treasury official appropriately named Scott Rembrandt.</p> <p>This study examined art market participants and sectors of the high-value art market that may present money laundering and terrorist financing risks to the U.S. financial system and identified efforts that government agencies, regulators, and market participants could undertake to further mitigate the</p>

laundering of illicit proceeds through the high-value art market in the United States. As a result, Congress mandated the study in the Anti-Money Laundering Act of 2020.

Several qualities inherent to high-value art – the way it is bought and sold and sure market participants – may make the high-value art market attractive for money laundering by criminals. These include the high dollar value of transactions, transportability of goods, a longstanding culture of privacy and use of intermediaries (e.g., shell companies and art advisors), and the increasing use of high-value art as an investment class.

“As we tackle systemic challenges like corporate transparency and other loopholes that allow criminals to abuse the U.S. financial system, we will look at what else might be needed to address money laundering risks specific to other industries, including the art industry,” added Rembrandt, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Strategic Policy in the Office of Terrorist Financing and Financial Crimes.

The study found that while there is some evidence of money laundering risk in the high-value art market, there was limited evidence of terrorist financing risk. The participants most vulnerable to money laundering in the art market are businesses that offer financial services, such as art- collateralized loans. Still, they are not subject to comprehensive anti-money laundering/countering the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) obligations. As a result, asset-based lending can be used to disguise the source of funds and provide liquidity to criminals.

“Once we’ve tackled more systemic issues, like creating a beneficial ownership registry to crack down on shell companies, we will look at what else might be needed to address money laundering risks specific to other industries, including the art industry,” the Treasury official, said in his statement.

Entities with lower annual sales turnover levels (such as small galleries) and entities that only occasionally transact high-value art (such as third-party online marketplaces, museums, other non-profits) may present a lower risk. In contrast, entities with more considerable annual sales turnover and regularly transact in high-value art in the ordinary course of business may offer a higher risk. Further, the emerging digital art market, such as the use of non-fungible tokens (NFTs), may present new risks, depending on the structure and market incentives.

To address the identified risks, the study recommends consideration of several non-regulatory and regulatory options: Encouraging the creation and enhancement of private-sector information-sharing programs to foster transparency among art market participants; updating guidance and training for law enforcement, customs enforcement, and asset recovery agencies; using FinCEN recordkeeping authorities to support information collection and enhanced due diligence; and applying AML/CFT requirements (such as suspicious activity reporting and know-your-customer procedures) to sure art market participants and obligating them to create and maintain AML/CFT In considering these steps, Treasury will consider how these measures could mitigate identified money laundering risk, the potential burden on more minor art market participants, privacy considerations, and progress on addressing systemic AML/CFT issues, such as the abuse of shell companies. In developing the study, Treasury conducted dozens of interviews with art market participants, such as auction houses, galleries, financial institutions, art advisors, art subject matter experts across the U.S. government, international partners that regulate or are regulating the art sector, and academic and non-governmental organisations.

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HEADLINE	02/06 Central District hit by vandals in crime rise
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/local-businesses-hit-by-vandals-spd-says-crime-is-on-the-rise
GIST	SEATTLE - Businesses in the Central District say they just can’t catch a break as crime is on the rise. Several local shops like Tougo Coffee and Ghost Note Coffee have been broken into. Their respective owners, Berhanu Wells and Christo Andrews, say they’re trying to stay afloat despite the ups and downs caused by the pandemic.

"It's always keeping us on our toes, trying to do what we want to do and also maintain consistency," Andrews said.

On top of the ongoing struggles the businesses are now dealing with vandalism.

"There's a big giant rock that was left behind," Wells described.

Tougo Coffee's door was shattered Wednesday night, and Sunday night, Ghost Note Coffee's was also targeted.

"They broke our side window," Andrews.

Boarded-up storefronts are now becoming an all too familiar site.

"It's a little exhausting having had this happen the third time," Wells said.

"I wish that there were more resources for us to be able to recover from that kind of thing," Andrews said. Seattle Police say overall, crime has increased by 10% compared to 2020.

Violent crime is also up by 20% and property crime increased by 9%.

The business owners say it's caused by several issues.

"We have a lot of mental health issues out there and people are just angry, frustrated," Wells said.

"The pandemic has only perpetuated that kind of inequity, so it's not terribly surprising that people would go through extreme measures to kind of try to feel like they're getting justice," Andrews said.

One of the factors affecting how authorities handle these crimes are [new laws](#) for how police pursue and arrest suspects.

Right now, officers need probable cause to arrest someone or even hold them if they're a suspect.

Two new bills in the House of Representatives would give law enforcement the ability to detain a suspect if they have reasonable suspicion and make sure the suspect isn't hurt.

State lawmakers are expected to take these bills to vote by the end of the month.

In the meantime, business owners say not only are the repairs costly but lengthy too.

Now they're just focused on serving you.

"Small businesses are here for their particular communities that they serve as a place of brevity and safety," Wells said.

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HEADLINE	02/06 Seattle CAO changes timeline tackle crime
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/seattle-city-attorneys-office-change-filing-deadline-incoming-cases/RFBHN5L455GHBCRHSPVNATFS2E/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The Seattle City Attorney's Office on Sunday announced a new change to the way it will file all incoming cases referred by the Seattle Police Department.</p> <p>City Attorney Ann Davison said a filing decision will be made on cases within five business days, which will stop adding to the backlog of cases that has grown over the past three years.</p>

	<p>Davison said it is the “most effective way to immediately tackle crime in Seattle.”</p> <p>She said there is a backlog of approximately 5,000 cases, which could mean up to a two-year-long wait period for victims.</p> <p>“This immediate change follows a deep assessment of the City Attorney’s Office processes and structure for addressing our case filings and intake. The best way to interrupt crime happening on the streets today is by quickly and efficiently moving on the cases referred to us by the Seattle Police Department,” said Davison.</p> <p>Davison said the backlog is the largest that the Attorney’s Office has ever experienced.</p> <p>In January, Davison enlisted former Seattle U.S. Attorney Brian Moran’s help in advising the office on the backlog, hiring and criminal priorities.</p> <p>“My recommendation and assessment is just the first step to solving the City Attorney’s Office case backlog,” said Moran. “The office will immediately stop adding to the number of cases that need to be filed and can address the nearly 5,000 cases that are waiting for review.”</p> <p>According to the City Attorney’s Office, crime has continued to grow in Seattle over the past two years and before the newly announced action, new cases were sent to the end of the line until they could be dealt with.</p> <p>“Timely justice for victims is just as important as timely intervention for those committing crimes,” said incoming Criminal Chief Natalie Walton-Anderson.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/06 Seattle police probe Capitol Hill gun battle
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3339238/detectives-investigating-reports-of-more-than-40-shots-fired-in-capitol-hill/
GIST	<p>An investigation is underway after Seattle police received reports of more than 40 shots being fired during a gun battle in Capitol Hill overnight Sunday.</p> <p>Witnesses began calling 911 at around 2:30 a.m. Sunday to report that multiple people were involved in a gun battle near the intersection of Pine Street and Melrose Avenue.</p> <p>Police quickly arrived at the scene and saw multiple people fleeing the area on foot and in vehicles.</p> <p>Officers found almost 40 spent shell casings and spotted bullet damage to multiple vehicles and buildings in the area, but they found no victims.</p> <p>Detectives and SPD’s Gun Violence Reduction Unit are now working to recover surveillance video that may have captured the incident from nearby business owners.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/06 Cruise ships ‘under arrest’ in Bahamas
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/fugitive-cruise-ships-reportedly-taken-into-custody-in-the-bahamas/
GIST	<p>MIAMI — The Crystal Cruise ship on the lam in the Bahamas from a U.S. federal court arrest warrant, the Crystal Symphony, and a sister ship, the Crystal Serenity, have been taken into custody by local authorities, according to reports.</p> <p>The Symphony, which was supposed to dock in Miami Jan. 22, has been in the Bahamas, avoiding an arrest warrant issued after Peninsula Petroleum Far East filed a civil lawsuit in federal court. Peninsula Petroleum claimed that of the \$3.4 million fuel bill owed it by Genting Hong Kong-owned Crystal Cruises and Star Cruises, \$1.2 million was for Crystal Symphony’s fuel.</p>

A federal judge in Miami signed an arrest warrant for the Crystal Symphony, which went to the Bahamas instead of Miami. The Crystal Serenity diverted to the Bahamas last week. Passengers for each ship were ferried to Port Everglades.

Their arrest was first reported by attorney James Walker on Cruise Law News on Saturday. The same day, CrewCenter posted what it said was an announcement by the Crystal Symphony captain:

“The ship has been placed under arrest by the local authorities over some unpaid bills, and as it bad as it sounds it’s actually quite a good thing that happen. We’ve been told that this will not affect any personnel movement. So the crew movement and crew sign offs can still go as planned, and we are in process of preparing this. So this is unfortunate news but this was actually quite expected.”

Crystal Cruises spokesman Vance Gulliksen emailed Saturday, “We are unable to comment on pending legal matters at this time. Crystal Serenity and Crystal Symphony’s voyages ended last month and there are no guests onboard.

“The officers and crew on board are being well cared for and staying in single accommodations some of which are guest staterooms. We are making sure they are comfortable and able to enjoy the various amenities on board. Crew members have been paid their January wages and we are meeting and exceeding all contractual obligations.”

Genting Hong Kong announced on Jan. 19 that it wouldn’t be able to pay its debts. Crystal says it’s halted its Ocean and Expedition Cruises through April 29 and River cruises through May.

Crystal has paused its operations for its Ocean and Expedition Cruises through April 29, 2022, and for River cruises through May 2022, following recent developments of Genting Hong Kong, Crystal’s parent company.

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HEADLINE	02/06 Women’s prison fostered culture of abuse
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/prisons-california-united-states-sexual-abuse-only-on-ap-d321ae51fe93dfd9d6e5754383a95801
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — Inside one of the only federal women’s prisons in the United States, inmates say they have been subjected to rampant sexual abuse by correctional officers and even the warden, and were often threatened or punished when they tried to speak up.</p> <p>Prisoners and workers at the federal correctional institution in Dublin, California, even have a name for it: “The rape club.”</p> <p>An Associated Press investigation has found a permissive and toxic culture at the Bay Area lockup, enabling years of sexual misconduct by predatory employees and cover-ups that have largely kept the abuse out of the public eye.</p> <p>The AP obtained internal Bureau of Prisons documents, statements and recordings from inmates, interviewed current and former prison employees and reviewed thousands of pages of court records from criminal and civil cases involving Dublin prison staff.</p> <p>Together, they detail how inmates’ allegations against members of the mostly male staff were ignored or set aside, how prisoners could be sent to solitary confinement for reporting abuse and how officials in charge of preventing and investigating sexual misconduct were themselves accused of abusing inmates or neglecting their concerns.</p> <p>In one instance, a female inmate said a man, who was her prison work supervisor, taunted her by remarking “let the games begin” when he assigned her to work with a maintenance foreman she accused of</p>

rape. Another worker claimed he wanted to get inmates pregnant. The warden kept nude photos on his government-issued cellphone of a woman he is accused of assaulting, prosecutors say.

One inmate said she was “overwhelmed with fear, anxiety, and anger, and cried uncontrollably” after enduring abuse and retaliation. Another said she contemplated suicide when her cries for help went unheeded and now suffers from severe anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.

All sexual activity between a prison worker and an inmate is illegal. Correctional employees enjoy substantial power over inmates, controlling every aspect of their lives from mealtime to lights out, and there is no scenario in which an inmate can give consent.

The allegations at Dublin, which so far have resulted in four arrests, are endemic of a larger problem within the beleaguered federal Bureau of Prisons. In 2020, there were 422 complaints of staff-on-inmate sexual abuse across the system of 122 prisons and 153,000 inmates. The agency said it substantiated only four of them and that 290 are still being investigated.

The Associated Press contacted lawyers for every Dublin prison employee charged with sexual abuse or named as a defendant in a lawsuit alleging abuse, and tried reaching the men directly through available phone numbers and email addresses. None responded to interview requests.

Thahesha Jusino, taking over as Dublin’s warden later this month, promised to “work tirelessly to reaffirm the Bureau of Prisons’ zero tolerance for sexual abuse and sexual harassment.”

She said the agency is fully cooperating with the Justice Department’s inspector general on active investigations and noted that a “vast majority” of these cases were referred for investigation by the Bureau of Prisons itself.

“I am committed to ensuring the safety of our inmates, staff, and the public,” Jusino said a statement to the AP. “A culture of misconduct, or actions not representative of the BOP’s Core Values will not be tolerated.”

FCI Dublin, about 21 miles (34 kilometers) east of Oakland, is one of six women-only facilities in the federal prison system. As of Feb. 1, it had about 750 inmates, many of them serving sentences for drug crimes.

Women made the first internal complaints to staff members about five years ago, court records and internal agency documents show, but it is unclear whether those complaints ever went anywhere. The women say they were largely ignored, and the abuse continued.

One who reported a 2017 sexual assault said she was told nothing would be done about her complaint because it was a “he said-she said.” The woman, who is suing the Bureau of Prisons over her treatment, said she was fired from her prison commissary job as retaliation.

In 2019, another Dublin inmate alleged in a suit that a maintenance foreman repeatedly raped her and that other workers facilitated the abuse and mocked her for it. When an internal prison investigator finally caught wind of what was happening, the woman said she was the one who got punished with three months in solitary confinement and a transfer to a federal prison in Alabama.

Then, in 2020, an inmate’s report that two Dublin workers were abusing inmates made its way to the Justice Department’s inspector general and the FBI, triggering a criminal investigation that has led to the arrest of four employees, including former warden Ray J. Garcia, in the past seven months. They each face up to 15 years in prison, though in other recent cases, sentences have ranged from three months to two years.

Two are expected to plead guilty in the coming weeks in federal court to charges of sexual abuse of a ward. Several other Dublin workers are under investigation.

	<p>Garcia is accused of molesting an inmate in the months before the pandemic began. Then the associate warden, Garcia made her and another inmate strip naked as did rounds and took pictures that were found on his government-issued cell phone and computer when the FBI raided his office and home last summer, prosecutors said. He would later be promoted.</p> <p>“If they’re undressing, I’ve already looked,” Garcia, 54, told the FBI in July 2021, according to court records. “I don’t, like, schedule a time like ‘you be undressed, and I’ll be there.’”</p> <p>Garcia, the highest-ranking federal prison official arrested in more than 10 years, had an outsize influence as warden over how Dublin handling of employee sexual misconduct. He led staff and inmate training on reporting abuse and complying with the federal Prison Rape Elimination Act.</p> <p>He was also in charge of the legally required “rape elimination” compliance audit, first scheduled for early 2020 but not completed until last September — about the time he was arrested. The Bureau of Prisons blamed the pandemic for the delay and said the audit, Dublin’s first since 2017, is not yet finalized and can’t be made public.</p> <p>The Associated Press does not typically identify people who say they are victims of sexual assault unless they grant permission.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/06 Federal Way police: fatal drive-by shooting
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/man-fatally-shot-saturday-night-in-federal-way-police-investigating/
GIST	<p>A man was fatally shot in Federal Way on Saturday night, the Federal Way Police Department reported this weekend.</p> <p>Officers responded just before 9 p.m. to reports of a shooting at the Park 16 apartment complex in the 35700 block of 16th Avenue South, a few blocks north of Todd Beamer High School, according to Cmdr. Kurt E. Schwan, a spokesperson for the department.</p> <p>“The incident is believed to have been a drive-by shooting,” Schwan said in an email Sunday night. “Officers are currently working on identifying suspect information, but none is available at this time.”</p> <p>When officers arrived at the apartment complex, they located a man in his 40s with apparent gunshot wounds, Schwan said.</p> <p>“Officers immediately rendered aid until relieved by Fire and Medics, but the male died at the scene,” he added.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/06 School shootings up amid pandemic stress
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/us/tsunami-woes-us-school-shootings-spike-amid-pandemic-stress-2022-02-06/
GIST	<p>Feb 6 (Reuters) - A 19-year-old former student was shot and killed after a high school basketball game a week ago in Beloit, Wisconsin. On Monday, a shooting outside Chaparral High School in Las Vegas left three teens hospitalized.</p> <p>On Tuesday, five teenage girls were shot and injured outside Rufus King High School in Milwaukee. Also Tuesday, a student was killed and another shot outside the South Education Center in Minneapolis, the only of these cases in which suspects were arrested. Two students from the school have been charged.</p>

Signs are emerging that the stresses and challenges of the pandemic are worsening gun violence in American schools. Researchers who are studying the phenomenon worry it will only get worse.

Already, campuses have been the site of 141 shootings so far during the 2021-22 school year - more than at any point in the previous decade, according to Everytown for Gun Safety.

Problems that predated the pandemic - such as inequality and inadequate resources - have grown worse even as COVID-19 has introduced new challenges, like creating such stress that half of teachers say they want to quit or retire early, according to recent surveys by the National Education Association.

What that means is there are now and will continue to be fewer adults connected to students who can see warning signs that a child may be heading toward violent behavior.

"Kids are walking into a system that has been massively weakened," said Ron Avi Astor, a school violence expert at UCLA. "We're going to see a variety of different forms of gun violence and violence in general. We're in a situation where things are going to get worse."

Astor said there are myriad factors behind the violence, among them the pandemic, increases in overall community violence and breakdowns in family structures. All those issues have created a "tsunami of mental health needs" in schools, he said. And the problems are cresting as teachers and administrators are ill-equipped to deal with them because of burnout, lack of staff and illness.

The problem is not necessarily too little funding, Astor said, but the missing human capital -- teachers, specialists and staff who could help tackle the crisis of violence.

BROKEN ROUTINES, MANY GUNS

Katherine Schweit, a retired FBI special agent who focused on active shooters and author of the book "Stop the Killing" published last year, said another key factor in the violence has been parents' erratic schedules in the pandemic. This means less oversight and less predictable routines for kids, making it even more difficult for parents, teachers and others to see warning signs.

"One of the things that we focus on when we talk about preventing shootings ... is what is different in someone's routine that might indicate to us that this person is on a trajectory towards violence," she said. "But who has a routine these days? Nobody."

The availability of guns is another factor, according to Jillian Peterson, a criminology professor at Hamline University and co-creator of the Violence Project research center. The past year saw consistent monthly record gun sales, though purchases have begun to ebb. Peterson said far too many of those guns are not secured in homes, allowing teens access.

One of the most important things schools can do right now, Peterson said, is create crisis response systems and teams so that students and teachers can report their concerns about specific students. This information can be funneled to people trained to evaluate the threats.

Peterson said that while it is impossible to know exactly what is driving increases in violence, researchers agree the decimation of school services is a big contributor.

"We know that a lot of things that prevented violence, like after-school programs and sports, are still not up and functioning in many places," she said.

"The pandemic," Peterson added, "has shown us that schools are so much more than schools. They really hold our society together and hold our kids together in many ways, from mental health to physical health to food security. And we lost that."

HEADLINE	02/06 Murder trial gripping Australia
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/06/australia-zachary-rolfe-kumanjayi-walker-trial/
GIST	<p>SYDNEY — The police officers approached the house at dusk, just as the sun was setting on the remote Outback town of Yuendumu. They had been sent to arrest an Aboriginal teenager who had broken his bail conditions and escaped authorities a few days earlier. But as Constable Zachary Rolfe tried to place handcuffs on Kumanjayi Walker, the 19-year-old again resisted.</p> <p>“Just put your hands behind your back,” Rolfe said, according to a set of assumed facts in the case. Instead, Walker pulled a pair of scissors from his pocket and stabbed the officer in the shoulder. As the two struggled, the White officer fired three bullets from close range, mortally wounding the teen.</p> <p>Between the first and second gunshots was a gap of 2.6 seconds — a pause that will be at the center of court arguments starting on Monday in Darwin to determine whether Rolfe will spend his life in prison. The police officer is pleading self-defense. Prosecutors argue that the second and third shots, one of which was fatal, were unnecessary and amount to murder.</p> <p>But between the two young men yawned another gap, a divide of race, power, privilege and history that has transformed the case into what one newspaper here has called “the most significant murder trial this century.”</p> <p>Rolfe, a decorated officer and army veteran, comes from a well-known family in Australia’s wealthy capital. Walker was an orphan from one of the nation’s poorest communities whose life had been marred by misfortune and misconduct.</p> <p>Their deadly encounter in Australia’s Northern Territory in November 2019 came two months after police had shot another Aboriginal person to death in a neighboring state. The back-to-back shootings became rallying cries for the Black Lives Matter movement in a country where past police killings of Indigenous people have gone unpunished.</p> <p>“This case is a bit of a litmus test,” said Thalia Anthony, a law professor at the University of Technology Sydney. “People critical of deaths in custody will be watching this to see if there is a shift, whether to have some hope for how we move forward, whether we will stop this continual killing of Aboriginal people by authorities with impunity.”</p> <p>Still, support for the police in Australia remains high. And the recent acquittal of the officer charged in the other killing around the same time shows the headwinds against officer prosecutions, Anthony said.</p> <p>The Walker case has proved deeply divisive. Thousands of people have taken to the streets to protest his killing. Thousands more have taken to social media in support of Rolfe. Police officers have been disciplined or fired for distributing T-shirts defending their comrade. Journalists have been barred from reporting some aspects of the case, and prosecutors have threatened to charge two reporters with contempt for allegedly bending the rules. The Northern Territory’s top official has had to deny accusations he interfered in the murder case.</p> <p>Adding to the drama is the Rolfe family’s recent decision to break its silence. The father has said his son is not a racist but a hero.</p> <p>“It’s an idiotic suggestion that anyone could form murderous intent in 2.6 seconds,” Richard Rolfe told the television program “Spotlight.” “He did everything he could to protect his partner’s life and then did everything he could to save the offender’s life.”</p> <p>Two men, two Australias</p> <p>Yuendumu sits on the edge of the Tanami Desert, almost 200 miles from the nearest city. More than 85 percent of its roughly 700 residents are Indigenous. Some are acclaimed artists. Yet half of Yuendumu is unemployed and incomes are only a third of the territory’s average.</p>

“It’s an incredibly poor place,” said Warren Snowdon, who represents an expanse of the Northern Territory twice the size of Texas, including Yuendumu, in Australia’s Parliament.

Like much of the country, the town has a history inextricably tied to colonial violence.

In 1928, Australia’s last known massacre of Indigenous people occurred not far from Yuendumu when a police officer led the slaughter of dozens of Aboriginal men, women and children near the Coniston cattle station in retaliation for the killing of a White dingo trapper.

Yuendumu was founded two decades later as a depot for the Australian government to deliver food and services to Aboriginal people, who were “forcibly relocated” from the surrounding countryside to Yuendumu, Snowdon said.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Australian states and territories passed “protection acts” that gave them tremendous control over the lives of Indigenous people, culminating in the removal of thousands of children, known as the Stolen Generations.

“The people who had to enforce that was the police,” said Warren Mundine, an Aboriginal politician who recalled being racially profiled as boy under the protection acts. “You have a long history of hostility and mistrust between the police and Aboriginal communities, and it still lingers very much today.”

The laws were eventually repealed, but in the Northern Territory, the federal government again tightened controls on Indigenous communities in 2007. Some of those measures — such as severe criminal penalties for alcohol possession and cuts to welfare for school truancy — remain in place.

“That enables the police to have a very controlling role in Aboriginal lives, not too different from the protection acts,” Anthony said. “So they live under different laws.”

Those laws shaped the short life of Kumanjayi Walker.

Walker’s family declined to speak to The Washington Post ahead of the trial. But relatives previously told media that the teenager was born with fetal alcohol syndrome, which can be associated with lifelong neurological impairments including impulsiveness, hyperactivity and poor judgment. His parents died when he was young, his father while in prison, “Spotlight” reported.

Walker had encounters with police as a juvenile, according to a spokesman for the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory, who said he could not by law provide additional details.

In June 2019, Walker was convicted of unlawful entry of a building, damage to property and stealing, according to the spokesman. A judge sentenced him to 16 months in prison with half the time suspended, and Walker was released to a halfway house in Alice Springs in October 2019, not long after his 19th birthday.

About a week later, Walker removed the electronic monitoring device on his ankle and left the halfway house in the middle of the night. When police in Yuendumu tried to detain him again, Walker threatened them with an ax and fled, according to the list of assumed facts in the case.

Three days later, Rolfe and three other officers were sent from Alice Springs to Yuendumu as part of an Immediate Response Team — tasked with handling high-risk incidents — to arrest the teenager.

Rolfe grew up in leafy Canberra, more than 1,500 miles from dusty Yuendumu. His father, Richard, is a well-known Audi dealer who is a Member of the Order of Australia — the country’s top honor. He and his wife, Deb, a prominent attorney, own a notable collection of Indigenous art. A profile dubbed them “one of the [Australian Capital] territory’s most high-profile and charitable couples.” They sent their son to an elite private school before he enlisted in the Australian army and served a tour in Afghanistan.

Rolfe and his family declined to comment for this article. But in his TV interview, Richard Rolfe described his son as driven to help people.

“If there is a need to put himself out there, to try and save somebody, that’s what he does,” he said.

Rolfe joined the Northern Territory Police Force, finishing top of his cadet class. In his first week on the job in late 2016, Rolfe stripped to his underwear and swam into a flood-swollen river to save a man. Then Rolfe swam and walked several miles downstream in search of the man’s girlfriend, who he found lying injured on the riverbank.

“I didn’t think there were crocodiles in the water but I wasn’t sure because I’m not from the Northern Territory,” Rolfe told a newspaper.

The rescue earned Rolfe medals for bravery. But the next time he made headlines, it was because he had been charged with murder.

'Dismay, sadness and anger'

If Rolfe is found guilty of murdering an Indigenous person, he would be the first Australian police officer convicted of the charge, according to Sophie Trevitt, executive officer of the Aboriginal legal advocacy group Change the Record.

“For too long the police force has operated with a policy of mates-protecting-mates, and it has got to end,” she said.

Fatal shootings by police are relatively uncommon in Australia. In the nation of 25 million, six people were fatally shot by police in the fiscal year that ended in June. In the United States, the per-capita rate of such shootings is more than 12 times as high.

Far fewer people own firearms in Australia, which means officers are far less likely to face a threat requiring deadly force, experts say. But Australia’s eight large police forces also allow for better, more uniform training than the 18,000 law enforcement agencies in the United States. A study by the Australian Institute of Criminology found that 37 out of 39 fatal shootings by police over the course of a decade were justified.

The statistics are little comfort to Indigenous Australians, who have watched a string of such killings go unpunished. In October, an officer in Western Australia was acquitted after fatally shooting a mentally ill Aboriginal woman who was walking down a street with a knife in September 2019.

“The Aboriginal outcome was absolute dismay, sadness and anger,” said Hannah McGlade, a human rights expert and associate professor at Curtin University who is Aboriginal. Not a single member of the jury was Indigenous, an issue she and other experts say Australia has failed to address.

Rolfe’s trial was moved almost a thousand miles from Alice Springs to Darwin because of concerns that public meetings and rallies had polluted the jury pool. Roughly 9 percent of Darwin’s population is Indigenous, half the rate in Alice Springs.

The trial will be broadcast in an Alice Springs courtroom for members of Walker’s community who are unable to travel to Darwin, but a covid outbreak in Yuendumu left the community in lockdown until recently and some families are still isolating.

The prosecution was handed a boost in November when Australia’s top court limited Rolfe’s ability to argue he was acting in “good faith” during the ill-fated arrest. That means the trial will probably hinge on the 2.6 seconds between the first and second shots, and what the jurors make of body-camera footage of the incident. If convicted of murder, Rolfe faces a minimum of 20 years in prison, though the jury can convict him on one of two lesser charges instead.

	<p>Mundine, who has watched the footage, said he believes the shooting was justified. But decades of injustices and stalled reforms have left many Indigenous Australians anxious for signs of change.</p> <p>“You’ve got the history of Australia, the invasion, people driven off the country and put in reserves, protection acts,” he said. “That builds up a lot of resentment.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/05 Wisconsin shooting: 3 dead
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/05/us/brown-deer-shooting-wisconsin.html
GIST	<p>BROWN DEER, Wis. — A gunman shot three people, killing two, before taking his own life on Saturday at an apartment building in Brown Deer, Wis., a village near Milwaukee, the police said.</p> <p>A witness, who was also wounded in the attack, said one of the two people killed was a man who came to the aid of a woman who was targeted by the gunman.</p> <p>Peter A. Nimmer, the police chief of Brown Deer, said that what started as a domestic dispute that unfolded in the building’s parking lot, hallway and second floor, culminated in gunfire.</p> <p>The witness, Eric Lewis, 36, said he was awakened by gunshots and looked out a window of the building, the Park Plaza Apartments, and saw a man holding a gun.</p> <p>That man was involved in a dispute with a woman whom Mr. Lewis said he believed to be the gunman’s girlfriend.</p> <p>The woman ran away, pleading for help, Mr. Lewis said. A man and a woman emerged from a car to come to her aid, he said, and the gunman shot the man who tried to help. The gunman then chased down and also shot the woman believed to be his girlfriend, he said.</p> <p>Chief Nimmer said at a news conference that the police were unsure of the relationship of all of the victims, “but we know at least two knew each other.”</p> <p>The identities of the victims were not made public. Chief Nimmer said those who died were a 23-year-old woman and a 31-year-old man. A child was in the gunman’s apartment but was unharmed and placed with relatives, he said.</p> <p>Mr. Lewis said he ran to the parking lot to help those who were wounded and at that point the gunman reappeared from a second-floor balcony, firing multiple rounds from a handgun.</p> <p>Mr. Lewis, who was shot in the right ankle, was treated at a hospital and released. A round also hit an officer’s car, Chief Nimmer said. No officers were injured, he said, and no law enforcement personnel fired their weapons.</p> <p>After the gunman fired on the police, officers heard a gunshot that they said they believed was the gunman taking his own life. Officers took the gunman to the hospital, but he did not survive.</p> <p>The police did not publicly identify the gunman.</p> <p>The shooting, which was reported at 10:09 a.m., drew a large police response, including members of the F.B.I., the Milwaukee County Sheriff’s Office and two armored vehicles.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/05 Store owners worried about shoplifting
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/feb/06/shoplifting-store-owners-small-businesses-gene-marks
GIST	There’s a war happening right now. No, it’s not in Ukraine (at least not yet). It’s on Main Street.

In Manhattan, where the New York police department reports shoplifting levels not seen in [nearly 30 years](#), a Rite-Aid store announces [it's closing](#) because of theft losses. Small retailers in New York have given [their district attorney](#) an earful. Residents and shop owners in San Francisco [say that](#) crime there has “spun out of control”. Chicago has [been the target](#) of “rampant” shoplifting incidents. Reports of “flash” shoplifting gangs have prompted legislators to introduce bills to protect businesses [as far apart as Kenosha, Wisconsin](#), and [Washington state](#).

Is this real or moral panic? Some columnists, such as [Amanda Mull from the Atlantic](#), says that the “the deeper you search for real, objective evidence of an accelerating retail crime wave, the more difficult it is to be sure that you know anything at all”. The Los Angeles police department [recently announced](#) that robbery, burglary and theft are actually down in the city compared with 2019. An activist group in Seattle [says that](#) in some cases shoplifting is “justified”. One retail association says that retail theft [would be less](#) if Amazon and Facebook didn’t make it so easy to sell stolen goods.

When you ask retailers, they’ll tell you that shoplifting is a big and growing problem. Just ask the National Retail Federation.

Half of the respondents in that organization’s [2021 retail security survey](#) said they saw an increase in shoplifting this past year. According to the report, theft and fraud cost retailers \$62bn in 2020 and the average retail robbery netted more than \$7,500 in product – a figure not seen since 2015. More disturbingly, about 69% of retailers said they have also experienced a significant increase in “organized retail crime” activity – thefts involving groups of people – over the past year. The reasons cited included the pandemic, lapse in policing and apprehension, changes to sentencing guidelines and the growth of online marketplaces like Facebook and Amazon.

Whatever the reasons, “inventory shrink” (retailer politesse for shoplifting) is above its five-year average and shoplifters are clearly striking quite a blow in their war with retailers. So how are merchants fighting back?

Unfortunately, they’re having to spend.

Many of my shop-owner clients are taking the obvious internal steps. These would include making sure their stores are organized and tidy, that their employees are trained to be on alert for typical shoplifting tactics, and that mirrors are added to avoid blind spots among updated and prominent signs that warn of prosecution. A handful have hired security guards. Those with very high-dollar inventory (jewelry, say) are taking more steps to secure these products or removing them from their stores each night. Others are installing more protective glass on their exterior windows and display cases.

Many others are investing in new security systems or re-designing themselves to thwart shoplifting. A Safeway store in San Francisco, for example, has added automatic gates that immediately swing shut behind entering customers in order to prevent thieves from running out of the store with full shopping carts. Other retailers are setting up [coiled wire](#) or [putting](#) more of their items under lock and key.

The [National Association of Shoplifting Prevention](#) takes a different approach by offering retailers the opportunity to participate in “progressive shoplifting prevention” that includes encouraging “a shift in focus to long-term education and awareness solutions, rather than continuing to invest solely in physical prevention and apprehension” by making investments to “reduce recidivism to break the cycle and cure the shoplifting problem rather than continually spending money to repeatedly treat its symptoms”.

Or you could do what one small merchant in Denver is doing: charge all customers an additional 1% fee on top of everything else to cover his shoplifting losses. Calling it the “Denver crime spike fee”, the owner says it helps him to recover thousands of dollars in losses. “We’re talking about six figures [in losses] for a really small business like us, and that is meaningful,” he told the [Denver Business Journal](#). “It impacts our employees, and, more importantly, it now is going to impact our shoppers.”

Maybe that’s what it takes to win the shoplifting war? I really hope not.

HEADLINE	02/05 Homeless in crimes: activists urge caution
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/incidents-violent-crime-homeless-grab-headlines-activists-urge/story?id=82443787
GIST	<p>Recent high-profile incidents of seemingly random violent crime allegedly committed by homeless people have been making headlines and putting city dwellers on high alert -- a harbinger for some of a return to more troubled times.</p> <p>In Los Angeles, for instance, a 70-year-old nurse was killed during an alleged random assault by a homeless man at a bus stop on Jan. 13, and just two days later, a homeless man allegedly fatally pushed a woman onto New York City subway tracks.</p> <p>In New York, where some of these attacks have occurred, the new mayor, Eric Adams, a former NYPD captain, has promised to address public safety needs to ensure subway riders feel protected.</p> <p>"Our system must be safe, must be safe from actual crime, which we are going to do and it must be safe from those who feel as though there's a total level of disorder," Adams said in a conference following several incidents in the subway system.</p> <p>"Since Jan. 1 when I took the train, I saw the homelessness, the yelling, the screaming, early in the morning, rimes right outside of the platform. We know we have a job to do."</p> <p>Adams has said he would increase police patrols in the subway system, pair law enforcement officers with mental health professionals to perform outreach and reduce police interactions with the homeless in order to streamline mental health services.</p> <p>However, many researchers say that homeless populations are often wrongly perceived as inherently dangerous and this stigma will only exacerbate ongoing issues of homelessness and poverty.</p> <p>"The problem with [such characterizations of homeless incidents] is that when such blanket statements are made, it overlooks and consumes the very nuanced reality" of homelessness, said Joshua Ellsworth, a crime and victimization expert at Chatham University.</p> <p>Mental health and homelessness</p> <p>Before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were more than 580,000 people experiencing homelessness in America each day, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. This number covers a diverse population of individuals and families living in shelters, on streets, in cars and more. It's not yet clear how much the pandemic has impacted the number of unhoused people in the U.S.</p> <p>In his new public safety plan, Adams focused on the importance of health care and assistance in ending homelessness and instances of subsequent crime.</p> <p>"Far too often, those critical periods where people have lost their jobs, lost their homes, or going through some form of health care crisis, if you don't reach them at that critical period, it would take a longer investment to turn their lives around and we want to do so at that critical period with proven methods and research," he added.</p> <p>Law enforcement and government officials in major cities also say that recent incidents highlight a need for mental health care that targets the needs of this population.</p> <p>About 30% of chronically homeless people have some sort of mental health condition and about 50% experience substance use problems, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).</p>

Following the death of the nurse in Los Angeles, [LAPD Chief Michel Moore](#) called the incident "a tragic and senseless murder directly tied to the failure of this Nation's mental health resources."

Homelessness and crime

People who are homeless are [often disproportionately perceived as crime suspects and victims](#). But Steve Berg, the vice president of the National Alliance to End Homelessness, says they are not behind a majority of the crime.

A 2016 report from the Washington Department of Commerce asserted that homeless people [are no more likely to be criminals](#) than those with homes, with the exception of camping ordinances.

And in Los Angeles, incidents involving the homeless as either the suspect, the victim or both made up less than a tenth of all crime in L.A, according to [LAPD open data analysis by ABC station KABC](#).

Police departments in New York, Seattle, and San Diego say they do not readily collect and distribute data on homelessness and crime.

However, homeless populations across the country are more likely to be a victim of a crime than the general population, according to [research in The Lancet public health journal](#).

"People are homeless are experiencing the greatest danger," Berg said.

In fact, homelessness is often criminalized and homeless people are over-represented in and adversely impacted by the criminal justice system, experts told ABC News.

Being homeless or impoverished means being susceptible to the many ways that life without a home is policed -- in camping ordinances, urinating in public, in panhandling, and other low-level crimes, Berg and Ellsworth say.

"Those low-level offenses that we would expect to see coming out of that unsheltered community will often be associated with survival techniques or subsistence behaviors," Ellsworth said.

Falling through the cracks

About 203 out of every 10,000 formerly incarcerated people are homeless, and nearly three times as many -- 570 out of every 10,000 -- is housing insecure, according to [criminal justice research group Prison Policy Initiative](#). The formerly incarcerated are 10 times more likely to be homeless than the general public, the organization reports.

People who have been incarcerated more than once are 13 times more likely than the general public to experience homelessness, and people who have been incarcerated once are seven times more likely.

Those who were homeless in the year before their incarceration had high rates of mental health, substance use, and traumatic experiences, according to SAMHSA which reports: 79% of homeless people showed symptoms of drug or alcohol abuse or dependence; 75% showed symptoms indicating the presence of a mental illness; and researchers also found high rates of other physical and emotional trauma.

This means homeless people are often in and out of jails and prisons without rehabilitation for their mental illness or trauma, making it only harder to find stability, Ellsworth said.

"I met many individuals when I was doing field work that said 'every day is a bad day. You always wake up angry'" Ellsworth said. "What population gets exposed to more traumatic life events than somebody living on the streets in higher crime neighborhoods in a dense city?"

He added, "Not to mention that the weathering of being exposed with the physical elements but the weathering of the exposure to the psychological trauma of having to constantly be on guard because you're completely unable to control your environment."

Need to address, experts say

Many experts say that the criminal justice system isn't addressing the issues of poverty, homelessness and mental health -- and solutions to crime must be multi-faceted to target these underlying conditions.

Without access to mental health resources and care, it's much harder to get people housed, employed and stable, says Rob Robinson, a formerly homeless man and advocate at the Campaign to Restore National Housing Rights.

"When cities start pulling back investments in mental health services, people end up on the street," said Robinson, who is now a professor at the New School teaching about community activism. "A majority of people who are 'homeless' don't want to be that way. There are probably economic reasons why, there are mental health reasons that we need to think about putting resources into to help folks."

Berg says investments in housing, whether permanent or short-term, is the number one way to get people housed. A shelter, without any qualifying conditions such as employment or sobriety, often serve as a segue for an unhoused person to feel stable and in control, able to take on other challenges facing them.'

[Research from the SAMHSA shows](#) that providing access to housing without forcing residents to participating in specific services, has proven to be successful in keeping people housed and allowing them to more easily work towards addressing mental illness, substance abuse or other health issues.

Homelessness severely affects ones physical and social wellbeing, and increases the likelihood of disability, mental illness or death, SAMHSA reports. Researchers have found that improvements in mental health symptoms and treatment access followed one's introduction into a permanent or short-term home.

And at the root of this, is poverty. Experts say cash assistance and income support services give unhoused people the tools they need to build a happy and healthy life.

"We know what works," said Berg. "We have lots of evidence on what works. It's housing, it's getting a job, it's getting medical care that deals with whatever medical or behavioral health issues people have. We just need to do that."

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HEADLINE	02/06 Shots fired into Tacoma restaurant kills 1
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/37-year-old-man-killed-while-inside-restaurant-tacoma/PSYZSUJTJ5BRBIEWPU6HHZTBXI/
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. — An investigation is underway after a 37-year-old man was shot and killed Saturday night in Tacoma.</p> <p>Officers were called at about 9:14 p.m. to the 3800 block of Pacific Avenue South for a report of a shooting.</p> <p>Police said an unknown shooter fired shots through a window into a restaurant and struck a man.</p> <p>The man died at the scene.</p> <p>No suspect information has been released.</p> <p>The investigation is ongoing.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/05 Hookah bar shooting Virginia Tech: 1 dead
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2022/02/05/Virginia-Tech-shooting-hookah/9101644068603/

GIST	<p>Feb. 5 (UPI) -- A shooting overnight at a hookah bar near Virginia Tech university left one person dead and four others injured, police announced Saturday.</p> <p>Gunfire erupted just before midnight Friday at the Melody Hookah Found in Blacksburg.</p> <p>The Blacksburg Police Department said one person died and four others were transported to area hospitals. One of the injured was a student at the school, Virginia Tech President Tim Sands said.</p> <p>"Events like this are difficult and unsettling to all of us. Please care for yourself and seek assistance if you need it," Sands said in a statement. "Our community is strong, and our strength is derived from our genuine care and concern for one another."</p> <p>Police said the extent of the injuries was unknown.</p> <p>The school was placed into lockdown until about 3:15 a.m.</p> <p>Virginia Tech -- formally Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University -- was the site of the deadliest school shooting in U.S. history. In 2007, an undergraduate student opened fire in multiple buildings, killing 32 people and injuring more than a dozen others.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/05 Colorado church shooting kills 1, injures 2
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2022/02/05/colorado-aurora-church-shooting-woman-dead-two-men-injured/1121644073281/
GIST	<p>Feb. 5 (UPI) -- A shooting at a church in Aurora, Colo., has left one woman dead and two men injured, police said.</p> <p>The shooting occurred inside the Iglesia Faro Luz Church in Aurora on Friday night, according to the Aurora Police Department's statement on the incident and a video news briefing.</p> <p>Upon responding to the scene, officers located a 36-year-old woman, 42-year-old man and a 40-year-old man, each with gunshot wounds, the statement said. The woman was pronounced dead at the scene. The two men were taken to the hospital and were expected to survive. Another person was transported to the hospital for other medical reasons.</p> <p>Release of the woman's name is pending positive identification and family notification.</p> <p>The triple shooting occurred during an event at the church where approximately 15-20 people were in attendance, according to the police statement.</p> <p>"We do know right now that there is some sort of relationship between the suspect and one of the victims," Agent Matthew Longshore, a police spokesperson, told reporters during the briefing. "It wasn't just a random shooting."</p> <p>The police department has not released the exact nature of the relationship at this point.</p> <p>Major crimes unit investigators were on scene interviewing witnesses, collecting surveillance video and looking for shell cases, Longshore told reporters.</p> <p>Officers have been working to identify suspect and make an arrest, he added.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/05 Texas shooting spree kills 4, injures 3
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SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2022/02/05/texas-corsicana-shooting-spree-four-fatal-gunshot-wounds-three-injured/5091644085674/
GIST	<p>Feb. 5 (UPI) -- A shooting spree in Corsicana, Texas, overnight killed four people including a child, and injured three people, before the gunman took his own life, police said Saturday.</p> <p>Officers said the gunman was responsible for two homicides each, at two different scenes, along with injuring three people, WFAA-TV in Dallas and the Corsicana Daily Sun reported.</p> <p>A 911 caller reported around midnight Friday that a suspect had allegedly killed his family, Corsicana Chief of Police Robert Johnson said in a statement to both media outlets.</p> <p>Officers found a man and woman dead from gunshot wounds at the home, and two additional gunshot victims were taken by air ambulance to a Dallas-area trauma center.</p> <p>Also, early on Saturday morning, the Navarro County Sheriff's Department responded to a separate location about 20 miles away, near the intersection of Garrity and Stroud streets in Frost. There they found the bodies of a man and child, both dead from gunshot wounds, and a woman with multiple gunshot wounds, who was transported to a Dallas-area trauma center.</p> <p>Police said they found the suspect "critically injured from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head," after a pursuit of his vehicle, and he was transported to Navarro Regional Hospital where he died from his injuries.</p> <p>The release of the names of the deceased victims was pending notification of next of kin.</p> <p>Police were investigating the incident.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/05 Officials: sex trafficking entrenched Mont.
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Sex-trafficking-problem-entrenched-in-Montana-16834092.php
GIST	<p>BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) —A woman made a call from a Billings motel room sometime in 2016. She called her family, telling them that over the past several days a man had forced her to be raped for money by other men in Billings, Missoula and Salt Lake City.</p> <p>The man controlling her was Terrance Tyrell Edwards. In 2018, he was sentenced in U.S. District Court in Billings to 30 years in prison. The women and girls snared in Edwards' sex trafficking scheme were from Montana, Washington and North Dakota. In bringing them to buyers across Montana, they passed through parking lots, hotels and other businesses. If anyone caught the signs that they were being trafficked and sold, nobody reported them.</p> <p>In the years since Edwards' conviction, the state Division of Criminal Investigation has assigned two full-time agents to a statewide human trafficking task force. Data from DCI showed that the Montana Department of Justice investigated only seven reports of human trafficking in 2015. Through 2021, DOJ tracked 68, The Billings Gazette reported.</p> <p>"Their data makes it appear as though the crime has increased, but I would argue that is not the case at all. It's always been here. What's increased is that we have more resources to investigate it," said Penny Ronning, co-founder of the Yellowstone County Area Human Trafficking Task Force and former city council member.</p> <p>The United States Department of State estimates that as many as 24.5 million people worldwide are the victims of trafficking at any time. Although the victim's circumstance can vary from girls and woman forced to perform sex acts in Montana to children exploited as domestic servants in Peru, the dynamic remains the same: someone is coerced by violence, threats or lies into doing something against their will.</p>

Between December 2007 and December 2020, the National Human Trafficking Hotline tracked nearly 74,000 trafficking reports.

While the Department of State reports that forced laborers make up roughly two thirds of all human trafficking victims, any data collected on human trafficking will be skewed. The quality of that data is hampered by gaps in information on victims, buyers and traffickers, leaving experts with a consistently incomplete picture. In the past several decades, strides have been made at the federal and local level to make that picture a little clearer. The U.S. Congress passed the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, a boon to the legal infrastructure to prosecute sex trafficking.

“As a volunteer, I would say that I’ve been invested in fighting trafficking my whole life, but we didn’t have any legal language about human trafficking until about 20 years ago,” said Ronning, who in 2014 started volunteering as a children’s court advocate in Yellowstone County.

During her time as an advocate, she saw evidence of several disturbing episodes in the lives of some children she represented. They were trafficked for sex work while they were within the state’s foster care system. She sought help from both the Billings Police Department and Child and Family Services, both of which she said lacked the training and resources at the time to respond to a report of sex trafficking.

“I struggled to find law enforcement or agencies that were meant to protect children to properly respond. It wasn’t that they didn’t want to, they just didn’t have any training for it ... What these kids were experiencing was so different from what I experienced growing up here,” she said, adding it was eye opening for her to learn there were two sides to Billings.

Ronning said she was eventually put in touch with the FBI, and the information she gathered taught her that sex trafficking was a community problem that neither Billings nor any city could arrest its way out of. Unlike a robbery where a clear victim and perpetrator can be established through an investigation, she said, the crime of human trafficking has several layers involving the trafficker, the buyer and the victim.

Trafficking reports rising

The data published by DCI shows a stark increase in reports of human trafficking, but Ronning said the crime has always been present in Billings and Yellowstone County. She also believes that the latest figures are only a fraction of the real number of victims. The only time in recent history that cases of human trafficking have risen in the region, she said, was during the boom of the Bakken oil fields in 2008.

The energy boom brought thousands of men to western North Dakota, and their salaries fueled a rising demand in the human trafficking market in the surrounding region. In 2014 alone, according to a series by Forum News Service on the exploitation of women and girls in the towns outside of the oil fields, more than a dozen men in North Dakota were convicted for trying to buy sex with underage girls.

The oil fields and money that flowed out of them created a massive customer base for traffickers, FBI Special Agent Brandon Walter told the Gazette, and it also built a circuit for them to impose on those who they coerced. Walter, who has spent seven of his nearly 15 years with the bureau investigating human trafficking in Montana, echoed Ronning saying human trafficking, particularly those sold for sex, is not a crime on the rise, but an endemic crisis in the area.

“Before, when I grew up in Billings and I was in high school and through grade school, I can remember human trafficking victims, but we called them prostitutes at that point, standing on Montana Avenue,” he said.

Around the year 2014, Walter said, federal and state authorities began to target human trafficking in Montana. Not long after, they realized that they had a major problem on their hands. Many had experience in prosecuting illicit massage parlors in Billings, which has since led to local legislation curtailing businesses that offer sex acts under the guise of cheap massages available 24 hours a day. However, investigators found a separate criminal industry targeting vulnerable young women and girls, who in the

digital age have vanished from Montana Avenue and reappeared on ads posted to websites offering “escort services.”

In contrast to the popular depiction of human trafficking in which a woman is physically kidnapped and sold into sexual slavery, Walter said the cases that he’s investigated involve a “psychological kidnapping.” Traffickers wade through social media and dating websites like Tinder in search of those who can be coerced. They’ll look for signs of prior abuse, issues with addiction or a woman who’s raising a child alone and use that as leverage against them after presenting themselves as a potential partner.

“Was she in a domestic violence relationship? Is she a single mother? Does she have an addiction I can feed? The pimp assesses those vulnerabilities on the first date...Then, and often times it’s on short notice, he says ‘We’re going to go to this motel.’ They’re giving them five minutes, no time to really think about it... Now, he converts to maybe taking over her social media account and says, ‘Now I’ve got all of your friends on Facebook. I can let them know what you did. Now you’ve got to keep working for me,’” he said.

Cases hard to build

Louis Gregory Venning pleaded guilty in November 2021 to coercing at least 15 women and girls into prostitution. All of the survivors were from Billings, and he trafficked them across the state and country over a period of eight years, according to documents filed in federal court. He faces a mandatory minimum of 15 years to life in prison. His sentencing is slated for March 2022. Walter said there’s no doubt in his mind that at any given time in Billings commercial sex can be bought from a human trafficking victim.

The investigation and prosecution of human trafficking cases is labor-intensive and can span years. Along with testimony from victims, prosecutors need to gather phone and financial records, ads posted online and metadata to trace a potential circuit. In one recent case, which was spearheaded by DCI, a man living in New Mexico coerced a woman and a 17-year-old girl into prostitution in New Mexico, Texas, North Dakota and Montana. Lavondrick Terelle Hagues is awaiting sentencing for aggravated promotion of prostitution in Yellowstone County District Court. The investigation into Hagues through his conviction in June 2021 spanned about five years.

In 2016, Ronning partnered with local attorney Stephanie Baucus to found the Yellowstone County Area Human Trafficking Task Force, a non-profit that combines data collection with advocacy to help prosecute human traffickers and assist their victims. During the course of the non-profit’s foundation, Ronning said she called roughly 100 different agencies to see if they would get involved. She also received input from numerous health care providers who said they had treated possible trafficking survivors, but did not have any information to confirm it.

“Many didn’t know how to identify or report it...So we had all of these people, especially teachers and medical professionals who either didn’t know how to look for the signs of trafficking, didn’t know what to do with that information or both,” Ronning said.

Ronning estimates that she’s hosted some 300 training sessions since the non-profit launched, and hundreds of organizations and agencies have partnered with the task force. The task force has also distributed between 50,000 and 60,000 cards detailing the signs of human trafficking and local tip lines. The signs include a younger woman with an older man claiming to be a relative, a woman or girl who seems physically abused, avoids eye contact or waits for permission to speak.

Targeting the buyers

With Gov. Greg Gianforte and state Attorney General Austin Knudsen announcing January in Montana to be recognized as Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month, both Ronning and Walter welcome more resources for law enforcement and victim services. However, key information is missing from DCI reports and indictments. The buyers, those fueling the human trafficking enterprise, are infrequently counted or named.

	<p>“Let’s start putting a spotlight on those who are paying to rape someone in an illicit massage business or parking lot or hotel room, because the crime is the same. It’s still a rape. There’s no consent on the part of the victim, ever,” Ronning said.</p> <p>No consistent profile exists among the buyers that he’s encountered, Walter said. They’ve included men still living in their parents’ basement paying with five and 10 dollar bills, line cooks at national food chains and businessmen driving \$85,000 SUVs. All of them assumed that the woman who they paid for sex wanted to be there.</p> <p>“In reality, she’s got a human trafficker watching her every move threatening her, saying he’s going to kill her and her family...You are engaged in raping someone, whether it be a child or adult when you are paying for commercial sex in Billings,” said Walter.</p> <p>—</p> <p>If you suspect human trafficking, call 911 in an emergency. In non-emergency situations call 1-833-406-STOP (1-833-406-7867) or reach an advocate via 406stop.com. If you see suspected traffickers, do not intervene, and remain at a safe distance. Take pictures of the trafficker, victim, and vehicle license plate if possible.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/04 SPD: man killed in South Seattle shooting
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/man-killed-in-south-seattle-shooting/
GIST	<p>Seattle homicide detectives are investigating a Friday afternoon shooting that left a 24-year-old man dead at 43rd Avenue South and South Othello Street.</p> <p>Officers responded at 4:12 p.m. after receiving a report of a collision and found a man with more than one gunshot wound, said Detective Valerie Carson.</p> <p>Seattle Fire Department medics provided aid, but the man died at the scene, said Kristin Tinsley, SFD public information officer.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/05 Seattle police probe Chinatown-ID shooting
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/investigation-underway-after-shooting-seattles-cid-area/RJQBGIESCREANPFG5ATMKVBLSE/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — An investigation is underway after a shooting Saturday night in Seattle’s Chinatown-International District.</p> <p>Officers were called after 10:15 p.m. to 12th Avenue South and South Main Street.</p> <p>One person was injured but it was not due to gunfire, Seattle fire medics said.</p> <p>The extent of the victim’s injuries is unknown.</p> <p>The investigation is ongoing.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/05 Tacoma police investigate robbery, gunfire
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/security-guard-hit-by-gunfire-after-person-robbed-tacoma-gas-station/RDEXYIJ2ORH4TPZJYWY6M5WR4M/
GIST	TACOMA, Wash. — Police are investigating after a person was robbed at a gas station and a security guard was hit by gunfire in Tacoma on Saturday night.

	<p>According to Tacoma Police Department spokesperson Wendy Haddow, at about 6:58 p.m. a person was robbed at gunpoint in front of the Pilot Express, located at 1440 Puyallup Avenue.</p> <p>The security guard on duty witnessed the robbery and then followed the suspect vehicle to the area of East 26th Street and Portland Avenue.</p> <p>The suspects then fired shots at the guard, which went through his vehicle. Bullets hit the guard who was wearing a bulletproof vest, police said.</p> <p>Police said the guard refused aid and did not require any medical attention.</p> <p>The shooters fled the scene.</p> <p>No information has been made available regarding the suspects.</p> <p>The investigation is ongoing.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/04 King Co. stop arrests non-violent crimes?
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/operation-crime-justice/should-king-co-stop-arresting-suspects-for-certain-non-violent-crimes
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — There is growing push back to a plan in King County to stop booking suspects into jail who have been arrested on suspicion of certain non-violent crimes, including car theft, drug dealing and home burglaries.</p> <p>The Department of Public Defense has delivered a long list of offenses that it wants the King County Council to pass legislation that would halt jail bookings for the accused. That list includes stealing cars, home burglaries, failing to register as a sex offender and even those offenders who are fugitives under outstanding warrants.</p> <p>Public defenders and corrections officers said a recent rise in COVID-19 cases fueled by the omicron variant has resulted in staggering staffing shortages at the jail. There are now concerns that quarantines resulting from COVID have led to inhumane confinement conditions for some inmates.</p> <p>But the King County Prosecutor's Office said the consequences for implementing the plan will not make King County streets safer.</p> <p>Victims of crime say things are already bad now.</p> <p>For example, the Williamsons have been on a frustrating hunt for their stolen truck, which vanished from their driveway in South Seattle two weeks ago.</p> <p>The custom GMC truck was more than just a vehicle, it was the source of their income.</p> <p>"I know other people who are victims," said Laura Williamson. "It's just maddening, it is just, I'm so upset I can't even talk. I get frustrated with it all."</p> <p>The truck was found recently in a tow yard in Spokane after officials said it had been involved in a high-speed chase. Police found drugs inside—possibly meth -- along with \$10,000 in damage, and the vehicle might end up being classified as a total loss.</p> <p>"We need to put these people away and keep them in there," Williamson said. "And not pat them on the back and say, 'Oh you'll be a good boy next time.' No, they're repeated, repeated."</p>

King County Prosecutor Dan Satterberg said the consequences of the proposal, if implemented, will create chaos.

"The problem with a blanket policy to restrict bookings is that nobody gets to look at the person and we just tell the police officers, 'Good on you, you just caught a car thief, now you have to give them a ticket and let them go,'" he said. "And that's very frustrating for everybody."

Prosecutors said this would apply to prolific offenders with even decades-long criminal histories.

Plus, the proposal comes after a new report shows an alarming rise in gun violence, and it comes after a year of surging non-violent crimes like car theft, shoplifting, and more.

According to the King County Prosecutor's Office, there are currently 1,350 inmates in custody at the jail, down from 1,900 at the start of the pandemic. That includes:

- 59 percent of them accused of a violent crime.
- 23 percent jailed for what's considered a "serious offense"
- 8 percent are jailed because of their criminal history.

The 1,360 people who are currently incarcerated are almost all there waiting for trial for a very serious crime," Satterberg said. "In my experiences most of them won't come back and most will go do more harm."

The new jail proposal was made before a new report by the Seattle Police Department found an alarming rise in gun violence, and it comes after a year of surging non-violent crimes like car theft and shoplifting.

KOMO News reached out to the Department of Public Defense to understand the motivation behind their proposal, but officials referred us back to a presentation they gave before the King County Council this week in which they pointed to COVID, staff shortages and concerns about isolating some prisoners.

"The situation in the jail has grown to a level that is untenable," said Rachel Schultz with the Department of Public Defense. "They have not been able to get clean clothes for 4 to 5 days and some have reported being unable to access shower facilities for 7-8 days at a time. These conditions are inhumane anywhere."

County Council member Girmay Zahilay said the tough task now is to weigh the balance between public safety and public health.

"These are just complex times where there is no easy answer," Zahilay said. "These are times of turmoil we're living in and we have to make sure we're prioritizing public safety at every step of the way it just also happens that we're dealing with this global pandemic at the same time."

The crime victims are urging officials to fix what's broken now, not make it worse.

"It has to stop," Williamson said. "Our Seattle has to come back to being beautiful again. It looks like a third world country, it is just a garbage can."

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HEADLINE	02/04 Court: Connecticut inmates no right to porn
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/business-lifestyle-prisons-connecticut-pornography-e309dd1dbf6785cef7d899ec9220a674
GIST	A federal appeals court has ruled that Connecticut prison inmates do not have a right to possess or view pornography in prison.

The ruling Thursday from a three-judge panel of the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a 2012 policy from the state Department of Correction banning porn from prisons with the stated goal of eliminating a hostile work environment for guards.

Judge Joseph Bianco, writing for the court, said the state ban “is reasonably related to legitimate penological objectives — namely, promoting a non-hostile work environment for DOC staff, enhancing the safety and security of DOC facilities, and facilitating the rehabilitation of sex offender inmates — and passes constitutional muster.”

The state argued that inmates would use the pornography to pleasure themselves, often in front of female correction officers. The ban on pornography was introduced in 2011 and phased in over a year. It made exceptions for scientific and artistic materials.

During 2012, correctional staff issued 494 public indecency tickets to inmates, according to the ruling. That number dropped to 79 in 2018, after the ban was instituted, Bianco wrote.

Connecticut Attorney General William Tong called the court’s decision an important win for safe working conditions in the prisons.

“Sexually explicit images are not allowed in any state workplace, and the prohibition against pornography was a lawful measure to protect the safety and rights of inmates and workers alike,” he said in a statement.

Attorney Joseph Scully, whose firm was appointed on a pro bono basis to represent the inmates, declined to comment Friday.

He had argued before the court that inmates have a First Amendment right to pornography, which he argued was not properly weighed against the interests asserted by the state.

But Bianco said there was evidence at trial that the pornography ban not only helped maintain a safe working environment for guards, but also helped keep the material away from convicted sex offenders, helping in their rehabilitation.

The case was originally brought by former death row inmate Richard Reynolds, who is serving a life sentence for the killing of a Waterbury police officer in 1992. He complained that he had never been accused of any sexual wrongdoing by guards but was forced to throw away about 60 magazines and 150 photographs. He said was later disciplined for keeping a lingerie catalog in his cell.

His complaint was later merged with those of six other inmates who challenged the policy.

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HEADLINE	02/04 Jury: Waffle House shooter guilty 4 murders
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/shootings-tennessee-nashville-james-shaw-jr-travis-reinking-e431e11a2bd977f21f5a82b9c551045e
GIST	<p>NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A man who shot and killed four people at a Nashville Waffle House in 2018 was found guilty on four counts of first-degree murder Friday by a jury that rejected his insanity defense.</p> <p>Travis Reinking, 33, did not dispute the details of the shooting, which was caught on surveillance video and witnessed by numerous people.</p> <p>Naked save for a green jacket, Reinking opened fire inside the restaurant just after 3:20 a.m. on April 22, 2018, killing Taurean Sanderlin, 29; Joey Perez, 20; Akilah Dasilva, 23; and DeEbony Groves, 21. He fled after restaurant patron James Shaw Jr. wrestled his assault-style rifle away from him, triggering a manhunt.</p>

Reinking looked in the direction of his parents, sitting in the gallery, after the jury read the first of 16 guilty verdicts, but otherwise showed minimal reaction. Meanwhile, survivors of the shooting and family members sitting across the aisle audibly gasped, crying and hugging as they left the courtroom.

“True justice is having my son here,” Dasilva’s mother, Shaundelle Brooks, told reporters after the verdict. “This is the closest (thing) to true justice.”

The jury will reconvene on Saturday to hear victim impact statements and decide whether Reinking will spend the rest of his life in prison or will have the possibility of parole. Brooks said she believes he should not be allowed parole.

Evidence presented during the trial showed Reinking had schizophrenia and had suffered delusions for years, believing that unknown people were tormenting him. He contacted law enforcement several times to report that he was being threatened, stalked and harassed. In July 2017, he was detained by the Secret Service after he ventured unarmed into a restricted area on the White House grounds and demanded to meet with then-President Donald Trump.

His behavior was so alarming that state police in Illinois, where he lived at the time, revoked Reinking’s state firearms owner identification. But that only meant he had to turn over his guns to someone else with valid identification.

Reinking surrendered the guns to his father, who later returned them to his son.

Since law enforcement declined to take his delusions seriously, Reinking began to feel that they and other random people were part of a conspiracy against him, psychologists testified at trial. Shortly before the attack, he believed that someone had drugged him, broken into his apartment and raped him. Reinking told psychologists that while praying about what to do, he received a command from God to go to the Waffle House and shoot three people.

To prove Reinking was not guilty by reason of insanity, defense attorneys had to show not only that he suffered from a severe mental illness, but also that the illness left him unable to understand the wrongfulness of his actions.

Prosecutors presented evidence that Reinking was calm and cooperative after his arrest, able to understand and respond to commands. Although Reinking was naked when he walked from the crime scene, when he was captured nearly two days later, he was dressed and carrying a backpack loaded with water bottles, sunscreen, a pistol, ammunition, Bible and several silver bars. And they mentioned he had asked to talk to an attorney after his arrest.

Davidson County Assistant District Attorney General Ronald Dowdy suggested that Reinking was acting out of revenge. He noted that days before the shooting, Reinking stole a BMW from a dealership.

Reinking wrote in a journal about plans to drive to Colorado, describing a life in which he would hang out with friends, smoke marijuana, hike in the mountains and “repossess” cars and houses so that he would not have to work, Dowdy said.

After police took the BMW back the next day, he wrote, “This time I would have to punish them by taking something they couldn’t take back, some of their own lives,” the prosecutor said.

“He got upset, and so he drove to that Waffle House angry, because he wanted to exact the same kind of pain and suffering that he felt, on others,” Dowdy said during closing arguments.

Prosecutor Jan Norman also emphasized Reinking’s own account of the shooting: He said that after killing Perez, “I felt like I was going to throw up because this was something God told me to do but it felt evil.”

	The jury on Friday also convicted Reinking on four counts of attempted first-degree murder and four counts of unlawful employment of a firearm during commission of or attempt to commit a dangerous felony. In addition to the four people he killed, he seriously wounded Sharita Henderson and Shantia Waggoner. Kayla Shaw and James Shaw Jr., who are not related, suffered lesser injuries.
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HEADLINE	02/04 Judge: Idaho gov. can't veto clemency
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/judge-says-idaho-governor-cant-veto-clemency-for-condemned-man/
GIST	<p>BOISE, Idaho — A judge says Idaho's governor doesn't have the power to veto a clemency recommendation by the state's parole board for a terminally ill man who was expected to be executed this year.</p> <p>The ruling from 2nd District Judge Jay Gaskill on Friday says putting Gerald Pizzuto Jr. to death would be illegal and so the court won't issue a death warrant — a required document before an execution can occur. Gov. Brad Little's office vowed to appeal.</p> <p>Pizzuto, 66, has been on death row for more than three decades after being convicted of the July 1985 slayings of two gold prospectors at a cabin north of McCall.</p> <p>He was scheduled to be executed by lethal injection last year, but after a clemency hearing the Idaho Commission of Pardons and Parole voted 4-3 to recommend that Pizzuto's sentence be changed to life in prison. The board cited Pizzuto's poor health — he has terminal bladder cancer, heart disease and diabetes as well as decreased intellectual function — and said commutation would be an act of mercy.</p> <p>Little, however, rejected the recommendation and said he wouldn't commute Pizzuto's sentence. Little noted the man committed the Idaho slayings shortly after being released from prison in Michigan, where he had been convicted of rape.</p> <p>Pizzuto's attorneys with the Federal Defender Services of Idaho went to court, with attorney Jonah Horwitz arguing last month that while Idaho's Constitution gives the governor the power to grant temporary reprieves from execution, it stops far short of allowing the governor to override the parole board's commutation recommendation.</p> <p>Attorneys for the state had argued a phrase added by amendment in 1986 to the relevant section of the constitution, "only as provided by statute," meant that the Legislature could modify the way commutation and parole powers are carried out.</p> <p>Deputy Attorney General LaMont Anderson told Gaskill during oral arguments that the Legislature had done exactly that in a state law that said the parole board could recommend commutation, but the governor must approve.</p> <p>In Friday's ruling, Gaskill said the final decision on commuting a sentence rests with the parole board, not the governor.</p> <p>"If the drafters intended to allow the governor to have the power of commutation, which is greater than the power to grant respites and reprieves, the drafters could have specifically stated this," Gaskill said, pointing out that the constitutions of several other states including Texas, Oklahoma, Arizona and Pennsylvania explicitly give commutation power to the governor.</p> <p>The judge also noted that the section of Idaho's constitution detailing the parole and commutation powers had been amended a few times — most recently in 1986 — but none of the amendments gave full commutation authority to the governor.</p>

“There is no indication that the founders, or the people of the state of Idaho in 1986, intended to give the governor the ultimate decision making authority with respect to whether [a] death sentence should be commuted,” Gaskill said.

In an emailed statement, the governor’s office said the decision was the ruling of “one judge,” and said Little had followed the constitution and state law as written.

“Governor Little will challenge this ruling because the state must have the ability to carry out the death penalty as ordered by the court in this case,” the office said.

Deborah Czuba, supervising attorney for the Capital Habeas Unit of the Federal Defenders, said they were grateful that the court upheld the parole commission’s “just and merciful decision.”

“As the court recognized, the Idaho Constitution wisely leaves commutation decisions to the Commissioners, who the Governor appoints based on their judgment and expertise in such matters,” Czuba said in a statement. “The people of Idaho have not given the Governor the power to interfere in the commutation process, and as the court found he acted illegally here.”

She said they hope the state will “now do the right thing and finally allow a dying man to pass away of natural causes in prison, rather than continuing to fight for an unnecessary execution through costly litigation at taxpayer expense.”

Gaskill’s ruling acknowledged the case would have additional appeals and likely go back before the Idaho Supreme Court. Still, Gaskill said his court would “err on the side of caution regarding which entity has the ultimate say in whether a sentence of death should be commuted.”

Pizzuto was camping with two other men when he encountered Berta Herndon, 58, and her nephew, Del Herndon, 37, who were prospecting in the area.

Prosecutors said Pizzuto, armed with a .22-caliber rifle, went to the Herndons’ cabin, tied their wrists behind their backs and bound their legs to steal their money. He bludgeoned them, and co-defendant James Rice then shot Del Herndon in the head. Another co-defendant, Bill Odom, helped bury the bodies and all three were accused of stealing from the cabin.

Court records show Pizzuto’s childhood was marred by severe and unrelenting abuse by his stepfather and his stepfather’s friends. He is one of eight people on Idaho’s death row.

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HEADLINE	02/04 Fifth teen charged in detention escape
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/echo-glen-childrens-center-escape-court-documents/281-51bb29c8-cf19-4aa8-8047-29e7eaecc42c
GIST	<p>SNOQUALMIE, Wash. — A fifth teen was charged with robbery and kidnapping Friday after escaping from Echo Glen Children's Center in late January.</p> <p>All five teens were reported to have escaped from the facility around 7:30 a.m. on the morning of Jan. 26. Four of the juveniles have been caught, while one is still at large.</p> <p>The teens are accused of working together to overpower staff at the children's center and steal the car of a nurse to escape the grounds.</p> <p>According to court documents, a nurse visited the teens' housing unit on the morning of Jan. 26 to give medication to one of the residents. When the staff member took the resident into a separate room to dispense the medication, another teen followed them. The teens grabbed the nurse's arms, and more residents began to "swarm" around the nurse.</p>

The nurse reported being hit in the face several times while one of the teens went through his pockets, stealing his phone, keys and wallet, according to court documents. One of the teens was holding a knife "and standing in a manner that indicated to [the nurse] that [the resident] would assault him with the knife if he didn't comply," court documents said.

The teens then forced the nurse into the "quiet room" which the teens locked from the outside.

When the nurse took one of the residents into the staff room, a counselor was in the common area with some other residents outside. One resident came over to the counselor, giving her a hug from the side, court documents said. When the residents began attacking the nurse, the teen holding the counselor pinned her arms to her side in an attempt to immobilize her.

After the nurse was locked in the quiet room, several residents forced the counselor into one of the cells and demanded the keys to the living facility, according to court documents. After a struggle, one of the residents struck the counselor on the head and ripped the keys from her hand. The residents fled the cell, allowing the secure door to close, locking it from the outside.

Another staff member arrived for her shift in time to see one of the teens attempting to unlock the door to the living facility and assumed something must have happened to the staff members inside, according to court documents. The staff member called the main office to alert them to the situation when the teens managed to unlock the door.

Two of the teens rushed out, followed by a third who held a knife up to his face and warned the staff member to get back. The teen slashed the knife at the staff member, leaving a two-inch wound on the palm of her left hand, according to court documents. The staff member was then hit from behind as two other teens exited the building and got into a Ford Focus. Five teens fled in the car.

Three of the teens were arrested the next day. Two of them were arrested in Kent and another in Kirkland. Another teen was arrested on Tuesday, Feb. 1 in Kent, where officers also recovered the stolen Ford Focus that was abandoned at a city park.

All of the teens face charges of escape in the first degree, kidnapping in the first degree, unlawful imprisonment, two counts of robbery in the first degree and theft of a motor vehicle.

The teen accused of threatening the nurse with a knife and wounding a staff member also faces charges of second-degree assault.

Two of the teens, aged 16 and 17-years-old, will be charged as adults, according to state law. The King County Prosecutor's Office also made a motion to charge a third teen with a past adjudication for murder as an adult.

Juveniles convicted in adult court, or people convicted of crimes they committed before their 18th birthday, do not face sentencing under adult guidelines, allowing judges to go below the standard sentencing ranges applicable to adults, according to the prosecutor's office.

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HEADLINE	02/04 Mayor: Seattle will not tolerate violent crime
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/mayor-bruce-harrell-to-lay-out-public-safety-plans-amid-downtown-seattle-crime-surge
GIST	<p>SEATTLE – It has been one month since Mayor Bruce Harrell took office, leaving residents and business owners asking what is being done with the rising crime rates.</p> <p>Mayor Harrell, along with Seattle Police Chief Adrian Diaz Seattle Fire Chief Harold Scoggins and his deputy mayors, broke down exactly what they have done so far.</p>

He started detailing the crime rates in the city.

“The increase started in 2020 and continues today in 2021 to give you stats, aggravated assault increased 24 percent over 2020, shootings and shots fired increased 40 percent to an all-time high,” Harrell said.

Overall, the violent crime rate is 20 percent higher than we’ve seen in 24 years.

Harrell says they have directed Chief Diaz to focus on ‘hot spots’ where crime is concentrated. He said so far, efforts are going well.

“In Seattle today, we will not tolerate violent crimes of targeting our most vulnerable,” Harrell said, speaking of the immigrants, homeless, children and elderly.

He says they are going to crack down on car break-ins, open-air drug markets and crimes in camps.

“We will all see an increase in our efforts to bring unsheltered people inside and ensure our parks and our sidewalks are open and safe for everyone to enjoy,” Harrell said.

The city plans to announce further plans for the unhoused in February with Dow Constantine.

He’s also focusing on getting more officers into uniforms and on patrol.

“We welcome good work,” Harrell said, revealing they are down about 350 officers. “We want to help you prevent crime from happening and when it does we want you to investigate and bring [forward] those responsible.”

The Seattle crime rate was up 10 percent last year, saying nearly every month was higher than the year before in shots fired and shooting calls.

Homeless-related shootings increased by more than 100 percent.

It has not been easier for the fire department, which made 94,000 calls in 2021, about 14,000 more than the year before.

Of those, 12,600 were homeless camp fires.

“When we respond often times these fires get into buildings, connect to brush on the freeways and different things like that,” Scoggins said.

The fire department responded to five homeless fires in January and 33 calls to homeless camps for aide.

However, deputy mayor Monisha Harrell said the city isn’t just pouring resources into the police and fire departments.

“This will also include mental health and substance abuse support,” Harrell said. “The one thing that should be very clear with this team is we understand the holistic approach of what it’s going to take to bring public safety to the city of Seattle.”

Deputy mayor Harrell said they are looking at resources and how to use them, but the plan would be to have a team able to direct people to the proper response they need, whether it’s the police, fire, mental health help or more.

“Our vision for public safety goes beyond those two departments,” Harrell said.

The community will have input into these services, which city leaders said will be sent to you in-person or virtually.

HEADLINE	02/04 Report: Seattle violent crimes hit 14yr-high
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/report-seattles-violent-crime-rate-reached-14-year-high-in-2021
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - In its 2021 year-end crime report, Seattle Police reported that violent crime in the city has increased by 20% compared to 2020-- which is a 14-year high.</p> <p>Responding to record crime numbers in the City of Seattle, newly-elected Mayor Bruce Harrell held a press conference saying the city 'won't tolerate' increases in violent crime, especially when someone uses a gun.</p> <p>"I've also directed Chief Diaz to focus on the relatively few individuals causing the most harm on these places with a special focus on those using guns," Harrell said during a press conference on Friday.</p> <p>According to SPD, shootings and shots fired calls increased 40% (+175) from 2020 to 2021, violent crime increased 20% and homeless-related shootings increased 122%.</p> <p>Harrell was flanked by Interim Chief Adrian Diaz, Fire Chief Harold Scoggins and many members of Harrell's new executive staff including his three new deputy mayors.</p> <p>He said Seattle Police are already targeting key areas of concentrated crime, like 12th Avenue South and Jackson Street in Seattle's Little Saigon neighborhood. The intersection is well-known as an open drug market where people also sell goods they just stole.</p> <p>He said during the first 21 days in January, which were Harrell's first 21 days as Mayor, SPD had 23 felony arrests and 14 misdemeanor arrests at that intersection. He said there were also 24 recoveries of stolen property and 10 drug seizures.</p> <p>SPD has periodically shut down the market, according to local business owners, but it keeps coming back.</p> <p>"If they want to shut it down, they can shut it down. They have warrants and everything like that, you know" said Wiley, a regular at the corner who only wanted to give his first name. "They do it when they are bored, when they don't have anything else to do. They do it when they are bored, that's what I think".</p> <p>Because of jail restrictions, the county jail is not booking people who have been arrested for most misdemeanors, like selling stolen goods at places like 12th and Jackson.</p> <p>FOX 13 News asked the mayor if there's a gap in his plan that doesn't account for repeat offenders who return to the street right after they are arrested.</p> <p>"No, not in our plan. Not in our plan," he said. "So what I will do is stay in my space. The city attorney and the King County prosecutor, their job is to prosecute. The judges, their job is to sentence. I have to protect the city. I understand that, but I have to stay in my lane and work with those elected people."</p> <p>The Seattle Fire Department is changing its tactics too. Last year, the department responded to 400 "scenes of violence" calls where someone may have been shot, attacked or injured at a homeless camp.</p> <p>Starting this week, Scoggins said firefighters are deploying ballistic vests and ballistic helmets and staging four blocks away when they show up at a scene of violence.</p> <p>"That's a change," he said. "Oftentimes, we've ended up in places that are unsafe for our firefighters, where people have been assaulted, stabbings or shootings, so we are being very intentional on how we connect with the Seattle police department before we enter these scenes."</p>
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